

“Don’t Wanna Be the Damsel in Distress!”

Female CrossFitters constructing strong femininity

Eveliina Mirjam-Maaria Raekallio

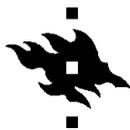
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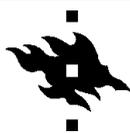
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<p>This master's thesis examines the meanings female participants in the sport CrossFit give to their practices. The study focuses on how the female CrossFitters construct their bodies and selves through negotiation of, and taking part in different practices and discourses.</p> <p>The thesis contributes to an ethnographic study on female experiences of sport. The study offers a feminist anthropological perspective on the study of the CrossFit phenomenon. As a theoretical starting point the body is seen as a combination of a lived embodied body, a political disciplined body, and a social symbolic body.</p> <p>The primary methodologies used in the study are participant observation and interviews. Photo elicitation is used to deepen the understanding of discourses related to the visual representations of the feminine sporting body. The fieldwork took place in Portland, Oregon for one month in August, 2014. Additional background information was acquired by the researcher's own bodily experiences of the exercises through the continued practice of CrossFit after the initial fieldwork period, and through numerous informal conversations with other CrossFit participants and non-participants.</p> <p>The study of sport has been established as an interdisciplinary field and in that vein this thesis draws from sociology of sport and other social sciences in addition to anthropological theory. In traditional anthropological fashion sport is examined as a ritual, and CrossFit is seen, using Victor Turner's ideas, as a phenomenon that has liminal qualities in that it renews the values and structures of a society through anti-structural performative acts. The study shows how in CrossFit value is attained through taking part in transformational liminal practices where athletic skills and abilities are acquired through gruelling workouts. Victor Turner's ideas are then extended in combining his concepts of liminal and liminoid phenomena, as a real life experience of the phenomenon is in a continuum where traditional and modern qualities get blended.</p> <p>The aim of the thesis is to emphasize the importance of the lived experiences of the women and listen to the way they talk about their practice. The analysis is based around the three main themes that come forth from the interviews; strength, health, and community. CrossFit is taken up in the name of good health, which reflects the contemporary ideology of health as a super-value. What is shown is that CrossFit practice gives women empowering experiences of embodied strength. CrossFit appears as a subversive space which serves to assist people on redefining their identities, as the selves are constructed in creatively negotiating the experiences to fit each individual's life situation. The significance of CrossFit practice for its' female participants is found in the empowerment they feel from the change that happens in their bodies, strength and gender identities, but also in the family-like quality of the CrossFit community and the experiences of flow that give practice meaning in itself, through the ritual doing.</p>			
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<p>Tämä pro gradu –tutkielma tarkastelee merkityksiä, joita CrossFit-urheilulajin naispuoliset harrastajat antavat harjoittelulle. Tutkimuksen keskiössä on naispuolisten CrossFittajien itsen ja kehon rakentamisen prosessi erilaisten harjoitteiden ja diskurssien kautta.</p> <p>Tutkielma osallistuu naisten urheilukokemusten etnografiseen tutkimukseen. Tutkimus tarjoaa feministisen antropologian näkökulman CrossFit-ilmion tutkimiseen. Teoreettisena lähtökohtana keho nähdään eletyn ruumiillistetun kehon, poliittisen kuritetun kehon ja sosiaalisen symbolisen kehon yhdistelmänä.</p> <p>Ensisijaisina metodeina tutkimuksessa käytettiin osallistuvaa havainnointia ja haastatteluita. Valokuva-elisitaatiota käytettiin naisten urheilevien kehojen visuaalisiin representaatioihin liittyvien diskurssien ymmärryksen syventämiseen. Kuukauden pituinen kenttätyö tehtiin Portlandissa, Oregonissa elokuussa 2014. Kenttätyön jälkeen jatkettua CrossFit harjoittelun kautta hankittu kehollinen kokemus sekä useat aiheesta käydyt keskustelut toimivat tutkimuksessa toissijaisena materiaalina.</p> <p>Urheilututkimus on vakiinnuttanut asemaansa monitieteisenä alana ja tähän pohjautuen tämä tutkimus ammentaa antropologian teorioiden lisäksi urheilusosiologiasta ja muista sosiaalitieteistä. Antropologian traditioon nojautuen urheilua tarkastellaan rituaalina, ja CrossFit nähdään Victor Turnerin ajatuksia käyttäen liminaalisena ilmiönä, sen uusintaessa yhteiskunnan arvoja ja rakenteita anti-rakenteellisen performatiivisen toiminnan kautta. Tutkimus osoittaa miten CrossFitin parissa arvoa saavutetaan ottamalla osaa uudistaviin liminaaleihin harjoituksiin, joissa atleetisia taitoja ja kykyjä hankitaan raskaiden treenien kautta. Victor Turnerin liminaalin ja liminoidin käsitteet yhdistetään käsittämään elettyä kokemusta ilmiöstä, jossa traditionaalinen ja moderni sekoittuvat.</p> <p>Tutkielman tarkoitus on korostaa naisten eletyn kokemuksen tärkeyttä ja kuunnella tapaa, jolla he puhuvat harjoituksestaan. Analyysi pohjautuu kolmen haastatteluista nousseen teeman, vahvuuden, terveyden ja yhteisöllisyyden, käsittelyyn. CrossFit-harjoittelu aloitetaan hyvän terveyden saavuttamiseksi, mikä heijastaa nykyaikaista ideologiaa terveydestä superarvona. Tutkimus osoittaa että CrossFit-harjoittelu antaa naisille voimaannuttavia kokemuksia vahvuuden ruumiillistumisen kautta. CrossFit näyttytyy subversiivisena tilana, joka auttaa ihmisiä identiteettinsä uudelleen määrittelyssä, itsen rakentumisen tapahtuessa luovasti kokemuksia neuvottelemalla, jokaisen omaan elämäntilanteeseen sopivalla tavalla. CrossFit-harjoittelu saa painoarvoa naispuolisten harrastajien parissa heidän tuntiessaan voimaantumista kehojensa, vahvuutensa ja sukupuoli-identiteettinsä muuttuessa, mutta myös CrossFit-yhteisön perhettä muistuttavasta yhteisöllisyydestä ja flown kokemuksista, jotka antavat harjoitukselle itsessään merkitystä rituaalisen tekemisen kautta.</p>			
Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords CrossFit, kehollisuus, naiseus, terveys, voimaantuminen, liminaalisuus, komunitas			

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1 Introduction

“Are there still people out there criticizing their friends and loved ones for wanting to get strong? Apparently, because I keep seeing blogs on this topic. If someone is knocking you for working towards goals you set for yourself may I suggest you excommunicate their ass? Or at least ignore them and handle your business.”

*“#f*ckwhattheytalkinbout #itsoktooccupyspace #playbig #shine”*

(Elisabeth Akinwale’s Instagram page)¹

This is a study about female CrossFitters’ lived experiences, and the way they construct their bodies and identities through discourses and practices in the context of their chosen sport. The above excerpt is from female CrossFit athlete² Elisabeth Akinwale’s personal Instagram page, and it is representative of other internet posts from female CrossFitters that peaked my interest before I knew anything about this sport. Statements like these are creating an image of a strong, active, independent woman, who is not afraid to “occupy space”. They are in conjunction with today’s commercial images of athletic feminine bodies, and phrases like “strong is the new sexy/skinny”. However, not everyone agrees. In the comment sections next to images of visibly strong feminine bodies, it is a recurrent theme for people to label these women as being too muscular. The strong feminine bodies do not seem to conform to the hegemonic femininity norm and the ideal body, as they represent the markers of masculinity through well-defined muscles. It forces these women to “talk back”, and defend their bodies and strength, which they have acquired through CrossFit practices.

I started my study with the idea that this thesis was going to be about female CrossFitters’ bodies, and how they answer to the changing beauty ideals and demands.

¹ <https://www.instagram.com/p/p1voU1lZgL/?taken-by=eakinwale> Retrieved December 10, 2015.

² Elisabeth Akinwale is known for finishing five times at top fifteen in CrossFit Games in women’s individual competition. She has also won North Central Regional Champion two times. She is also a CrossFit coach. (<http://elisabethakinwale.com/about/>)

But through my experience and journey into the world of CrossFit, I learned that there was so much more to this phenomenon. My focus turned into listening to what female CrossFitters themselves find important, and how they give meaning to the discourses in the surrounding society and the practices that they have incorporated into their daily lives.

CrossFit is a sport and a training method developed in the late 1990s by former gymnast and fitness coach Greg Glassman. CrossFit uses movements common to other sports such as gymnastics and weight lifting, and these movements are performed at high intensity. CrossFit is a multi-million dollar company that promotes itself as “forging elite fitness”. CrossFit is also a lifestyle that includes education about movement, fitness and nutrition. The company has more than 11, 000 affiliated gyms world-wide in 2016, and more than 100 000 accredited trainers. Glassman has also created a competition called CrossFit Games, where “the Fittest Man and Woman on Earth” are crowned. CrossFit represents a cultural phenomenon with CrossFitters all around the world forming a community that is constructed on the global level in internet forums, social media and company websites, and on a local level through embodied practices at CrossFit gyms. (What is CrossFit? 2015.)

CrossFit positions itself as something different from traditional fitness³ gyms and has branded itself as “the sport of fitness”. Sassatelli (2010, 99) defines fitness as “not geared to a specific performance to be achieved or reproduced to the maximum on a special sporting occasion”. In her words, fitness is “embodied performance” and contrasted to sport activities that are “athletic performance” (ibid.). CrossFit on the other hand has turned fitness training into a competitive sport that reinvents fitness fanatics as athletes. (Dawson, 2015.) Heywood (2015) calls CrossFit an immersive sport in that it combines elements of competitive and participatory models of sport, with the competitive model being quantifiable with explicit goals and the participatory model being based on “play for fun”. Heywood writes that CrossFit, being immersive, contains

³ The reference here is to fitness as “keep-fit” exercises (Sassatelli, 2010), not competitive fitness, which is a sport related to bodybuilding. As Sassatelli (2010, 212) writes: “*bodybuilding and keep-fit training appear quite different in terms of both the physical characteristics they promote and their motivational logics.*” Bodybuilders compete with highly specific physical appearances instead specific task performance (ibid. 212.).

the competition aspect with its positive effects like in-group bonding and empowerment of disenfranchised individuals, but the activity is performed in the context of safety, not threat/humiliation. (Ibid. 26.) Dawson (2015) also writes that what partly explains the popularity of CrossFit is that it appeals to both types of people; those who would not usually participate in high performance sports and those who wish to excel in competitive, elite sports. CrossFit encompasses both "health-related fitness" and "skill-related fitness" (ibid. 3).

What makes CrossFit stand out from other fitness regimes available for a modern consumer is how the people who practice it are presented in the media as being "crazy" for putting their bodies through such a hard workout, and also how the CrossFit gyms are advertised through a stream of images of very muscular bodies and slogans that propose that they are creating a "superhuman"⁴. Marcelle C. Dawson (2015, 9) writes that CrossFit's promotional material is saturated with the idea that it produces superlative human beings. I am interested to see how this kind of media image and creation of the ideal of "superhuman" body is lived and experienced by the women who take part in this sport.

This thesis explores the reasons that the women themselves give for their interest in CrossFit's practices. First being a training method for military, police and firefighters, in recent years CrossFit has been growing in popularity, especially with women participants. In the CrossFit gyms I visited during my fieldwork, over half of the customers were females, and one of the gyms used to offer a special women's open class on Saturdays. Also different groups dedicated for female CrossFitters are common in many CrossFit affiliates, and special fund raising competitions for women are organized in different parts of the United States. A group of female CrossFitters called *Femme Royale*, who organize female only CrossFit competitions and fundraisers, describe themselves with the following statement:

"Femme Royale is an expression, way of life for the women of our generation. Striving to live a stronger more passionate life. Not accepting defeat. Owning who they are and

⁴ http://crossfitoneworld.typepad.com/crossfit_one_world/2011/04/superhuman.html

what they want to become. Powerful women who want to change the world." (Website of Femme Royale)⁵

It is evident from the above examples that CrossFit is creating a media image of a strong powerful woman. I will analyze the question about femininity and female body image and how the female CrossFitters answer to it through the application of theories about power, discourse and embodiment. In traditional anthropological fashion I will also examine the ritual qualities of sport.

This thesis is an ethnographic study in anthropology of sport influenced by feminist sport sociology. The primary methodologies used were participant observation and semi-structured interviews. In the end of each interview I also applied a technique that can be referred to as a methodology of photo elicitation. The fieldwork took place in the United States in Portland, Oregon for one month in August, 2014. Additional background information was acquired by my own bodily experiences of the exercises through the continued practice of CrossFit after the initial fieldwork period, and also through numerous informal conversations with other CrossFit participants and non-participants.

My research question is: *How do female CrossFitters construct femininity, their bodies and selves in the context of CrossFit?*

In the next chapter I will formulate a theoretical background for answering this question. These include studies about body as a symbol, embodiment, study of ritual, liminality and communitas, performativity of gender, Foucault's theories of power, and Foucauldian inspired studies on health and women's sports. I will also go through the previous studies on CrossFit, and examine how these theories can be applied to the present study. In chapter three I will introduce my methodologies and the data collected during fieldwork. Chapter four is dedicated to explaining the CrossFit phenomenon through my own practice, previous research, and information gathered from CrossFit company's website. Chapters five through seven present the analysis of my own research material collected by interviews, and in chapter eight I will draw conclusions from my analysis of the data in light of the used theories.

⁵ <http://www.femmeroyale.com/#!about/cee5>

2 Theoretical perspectives

In this thesis I aim to look at female CrossFitters' practices from a point of view that takes into account the social symbolic body, the lived and embodied body and the disciplined political body. With keeping this in mind, I will see how the women, through performative acts and discursive practices construct their femininity and their ideas about CrossFit, and how sport is also experienced and given meaning to as a lived practice. In this chapter I will review the theoretical background behind these ideas.

I will be borrowing from other disciplines, using ideas from theorists such as Michel Foucault, Judith Butler and Robert Crawford. However, anthropological theories of ritual, and looking at the body as a symbol and a carrier of cultural meaning are at the center stage of my study. I have been inspired by Taina Kinnunen and Alan Klein in their minute descriptions of the bodybuilding culture, and I follow Niko Besnier and Susan Brownell in their suggestion for looking at the ritual aspects of sport. Also, Anne Bolin and Jane Granskog have offered important perspective from an anthropological point of view on studying female involvement in sports through their ethnographic studies. Finally, I turn to Victor Turner for his study of liminality and *communitas* to examine the lived experiences of the female CrossFitters, and how the CrossFit community is constructed through ritual participation in the workouts.

2.1 Anthropology of sport

Kendall Blanchard and Alyce Cheska, in their book *The Anthropology of Sport: An Introduction*, define sport as a gamelike activity that has rules, a competitive element, and requires some form of physical exertion (1985, 14). They write that sport can be viewed as assuming several different forms, each reflecting varying combinations of work, leisure, play and not-play⁶ (ibid. 51). Sport can also be viewed as having both

⁶ Blanchard and Cheska (1985, 46) do not see work and play as polar opposites, hence they refer to the conceptual counterpart of play as not-play, an activity marked by a lack of pleasure, an element of constraint and a stark realism.

athletic and nonathletic variations, athletic referring to those activities requiring greater amount of physical exertion (ibid. 60). Blanchard and Cheska point out that in the history of anthropology sport has generally been included within the broader category of “games” (ibid. 14). E. B. Tylor was, in the 1800s, one of the first social scientists to recognize the importance of games as a subject of scholarly investigation. Still, the sport phenomena were not at the center of his study interest as he treated them as a vehicle for the analysis of broader cultural processes. Also according to Blanchard and Cheska (1985), Tylor’s study of sport, like other anthropologists’ that studied sport in that era, did not generate a theoretical framework for studying sport and games today. (Ibid. 16.) The number of anthropologists studying sport has increased after the 1960s, and with the formation of the Association for the Anthropological Study of Play in the year 1974, sport has become a “legitimate subject of serious study (Ibid. 25).

The study of sport has been established as an interdisciplinary field dominated by sociology, psychology and kinesthetic (Bolin and Granskog, 2003, 9). According to Blanchard and Cheska (1985), however, the anthropological focus provides a distinctive framework within which one might address specialized problems such as the relation between sport and ethnicity, the role of gender in sport, international understanding, sport and ritual, the aging process and recreation for the elderly and sport and violence in human society. The growing literature in anthropology of sport includes a wide array of different sporting disciplines, such as bodybuilding (Klein, 1993; Kinnunen, 2001; Bolin, 2003), triathlon (Granskog, 2003) and rugby (Howe, 2003), also in different cultural contexts like wrestling in India (Alter, 1997) and sport in China (Brownell, 1995). Bolin and Granskog (2003) as well as Blanchard and Cheska (1985), however, note that much work in the anthropology of sport remains to be done. Noel Dyck (2004) points out that depending on one's theoretical inclinations, the anthropological study of sports can be approached from many directions. He emphasizes the multiplicity of sporting experiences, outcomes and identities that an anthropologist encounters in the field, and points out how sport has a capacity to generate pleasure, passion, social investment and personal commitment from its participants. Hence, anthropological study of sport offers an insight into how sport is used “as an instrument for mediating and reshaping social, personal and political arrangements.” (Ibid. 3-8.)

2.2 The body, symbolism and agency

As one of the main theoretical orientations of this thesis, the body is seen as symbolic. Taina Kinnunen (2001) writes that anthropology has contributed to the research of the body by showing how body is a cultural construct. The shape, the techniques and the perception of the body are all culturally dependent. (Ibid. 16.) Mary Douglas was one of the first to articulate this symbolic significance of the body. Her reading of the body is one of the defining works of the representational perspective, which focuses on the body as a conduit of social meaning (Reischer and Koo, 2004, 298-300). Douglas (1970) sees the body as a symbolic medium on which the hierarchies and the central rules of a culture are inscribed. Symbols that are based on bodily processes, even if they seem to be more natural than language, are culturally learned and culturally transmitted. They get their meaning from social experience which is coded by a community with a shared history. According to Douglas, symbols are all social and they are used to express different social experiences. The social body also constrains the way the physical body is perceived. This results in the body itself to be a restricted medium for expression. Through its movement social pressures are expressed, and the care that is given to it, in grooming and feeding, or theories about what it needs in the way of sleep or exercise are all drawn upon the culturally processed idea of the body. (Douglas 1970, 65.) Blanchard and Cheska (1985, 75) write that any time when sport becomes a public performance there are many opportunities to apply the symbolic anthropology model. The questions raised can be of social organization, social class, political behavior, national character and religion, because all of these aspects of culture are potentially symbolized in sport activities. Blanchard and Cheska (1985, 79) point to Clifford Geertz's study, in 1972, in which he shows how Balinese cockfight as a form of spectator sport is a symbolic message about Balinese social life, told in a metaphorical way.

Marcel Mauss (1973, 75) also sees body as carrying symbolic significance, and has noted that the body is a man's first and most natural technical object. By this he points to what he calls as techniques of the body, the cultural ways in which men know how to use their bodies (ibid. 70). Mauss (1973) and Douglas (1970) look at the body as reflecting the values and rules of a society, when Michel Foucault (1977) brings another

perspective to the conversation by concentrating on how the techniques of the body control and manipulate the human form. Foucault's technologies of body and self, create a body that is "docile" in that it can be transformed, used and improved through distinct regimes, like the rhythms of work, rest, holidays, food, eating habits, and moral laws and values, which all have an effect on our bodies (Foucault, 1980). For Mauss (1973, 73) these everyday habits are part of what he calls habitus, which varies with individuals and especially between societies, educations, proprieties and fashions (ibid. 73).

Pierre Bourdieu (1977) then developed the idea of habitus that has since been applied widely to the study of sport. Bourdieu's (1977) habitus is a set of acquired dispositions which guide actors in their choices. According to Bourdieu, habitus is socially constructed and works beneath the level of consciousness and discourse. It is the product of history that produces individual and collective practices in accordance with the schemes engendered by history (ibid. 82.). Habitus is also inscribed onto the body through those practices. Bourdieu follows Merleau-Ponty in emphasizing the embodiment. Marcoulatos (2001) brings together the theories of these two scholars, because he sees that the key target in the work of both thinkers is the dissolution of the subject/object dichotomy and bringing focus to the experience of the lived body. Marcoulatos sees Merleau-Ponty's phenomenal body equivalent to habitus as presented in Bourdieu's work, because the shared theme in both of these theories is that the body is a carrier of significance. The body as embodied significance has power to contribute in a meaningful way to social interaction, because it projects its lived structure towards its surroundings. (Marcoulatos 2001, 1-5.) Thomas J. Csordas (1988, 39) also argues that the body is a productive starting point for analyzing culture. However, he sees that Merleau-Ponty's and Bourdieu's theories of embodiment differ in that Merleau-Ponty elaborates embodiment in the problematic of perception, and Bourdieu situates embodiment in an anthropological discourse of practice. Merleau-Ponty starts with the "body in the world", an existential beginning of perception, the preobjective and the preabstract. (Ibid. 7-9.) Bourdieu's goal with his theory of practice is to move beyond both, phenomenology and a science of the objective conditions of possibility of social life (ibid. 10-11).

Habitus for Bourdieu is also the embodiment of social class. Posture, manners and ways of speaking are examples of how habitus makes visible a person's social position. Bourdieu also applies these ideas to sporting practices. Michael Atkinson (2008, 166), in his study of triathletes, uses Bourdieu's idea of habitus when he describes their socially learned personality structure and inspects their "habitus" as they construct suffering as exciting and socially significant and configure the sport socially meaningful. Atkinson follows Bourdieu in talking about social class and presenting triathlon as specifically middle-class sporting practice (ibid. 166-167).

Niko Besnier and Susan Brownell (2012, 449) on the other hand note that Bourdieu's joining together specific sports to specific social classes is historically and spatially unstable, and to avoid delimiting the object of her analysis, Brownell (1995) introduces a concept of "body culture". She understands body culture as embodied culture, which includes all bodily daily practices, the way of speaking and eating and the way the body is publicly displayed, also the lifestyle that is expressed in that display. "Body culture reflects the internalization and incorporation of culture." (Ibid. 10-11.) This idea seems close to Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Brownell, however, writes that the idea of body culture is to overcome the problematic division between the prelinguistic body and institutionalized belief. This was also Bourdieu's goal, but Brownell sees that with her concept, she brings the focus on bodily practices and the process of habituation (ibid. 11-12).

Greg Noble and Megan Watkins (2003, 521) criticize Bourdieu's emphasis on the unconscious nature of habitus, as they bring forth how consciousness is an important part in contemporary sports training. They also see Bourdieu's concept of habitus as deterministic and static, in that agency seems to be only an effect of structure (ibid. 524.) Noble and Watkins (2003, 526) set to renovate the concept of habitus to be more productive, and want to shift the focus on the acquisition of sporting habitus to capture the dynamic nature of embodiment, so like Brownell, they want to direct focus to "habituation". By habituation they mean the crucial part in sports, when through the refinement of technique the practice becomes "naturalized" and largely automatic. Conscious behavior becomes unconscious in a dialectical process of bringing consciousness to behavior in order to alter it, then habituating that behavior. (Ibid. 535.)

Like Besnier and Brownell (2012) and Nobel and Watkins (2003), I see Bourdieu's habitus and its connection to social class as problematic for the present study, because of CrossFit being a popular sport and training method for people from a variety of backgrounds, hence I turn to Foucault's theory of power, which seems to offer a tool for analyzing productive nature of the way that people use their bodies in the world. Foucault's (1977) theory focuses on critically examining the discursive practices that join the analyzable body with the manipulable body. For Bourdieu, habitus works beneath discourse as a determining factor, when Foucault concentrates on analyzing the power that produces the "truth" and desire through discursive practices. Foucault's concept of power can be seen as offering more of a processual understanding of knowledge formation in the interplay of power relations. (Foucault, 1980.) Foucault (1977) brings forth an idea of disciplinary power that is concentrated on individual bodies, its goal being the constitution of socially constrained, but economically productive, useful individuals.

Foucault (1978) sees power as something that is exercised, never possessed, meaning that power emerges in relationships and interactions. Foucault's power must be understood as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization. These force relations are transformed, strengthened or reversed through continued struggles and confrontations. Foucault points out that power is not an institution, a structure or strength we possess, but it is a complex strategical situation in a particular society. (Foucault 1978: 92-93.)

Foucault's theory has also been criticized for not having room for agency, because of the way he sees power as immanent and all-encompassing. However, according to Foucault (1978), discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but it can also undermine and expose it and make it fragile. Foucault writes that where there is power, there is resistance. (Ibid. 95.) What he means by that is that resistance is coextensive with power. As soon as there is power relation, there is the possibility of resistance. It is possible to modify power's grip in determinate conditions and according to a precise strategy. (Foucault, 1996.) Lynch (2011) explains Foucault's ideas, and writes that how Foucault sees power is that it appears in the first instance in specific, local, individual choices, behaviors and interactions. From those choices, combined in myriad ways, it is transformed into larger social patterns. The disciplinary techniques of the body and

technologies of self are how power functions at the micro-level of individuals. (Ibid. 22-23.) Lynch (2011) points out that when individuals are able to act and make choices on the micro-level, what they are unable to control are the effects on the strategic macro-level. The strategies are built out of combinations of local tactics but they are never the direct result of any particular individual action or choice. Therefore there is the possibility for individual agency, and subjects can act intentionally, even if their actions are conditioned and limited by the “strategical situation” in which they find themselves. Lynch concludes that through resistance, power relations can then always be altered. (Ibid. 23-24.)

In this thesis the body is seen as symbolic; it is culturally constructed and a carrier of meaning. It is also “docile”, which means it is malleable through distinct regimes and habits. Foucault’s ideas of disciplinary power are used to analyze how the female CrossFitters take part in the technologies of self by adopting different practices of diet and exercise. The way that power works is seen as simultaneously restrictive and productive. Individual choices are made within the available strategical situation, but the multiplicity of discourses and power relations leaves room for creative change and transformation.

2.3 Gender identity and lived body

My research has been heavily influenced by Foucault’s (1978) and Judith Butler’s (1990) ideas. Joining together these two theorists brings forth how knowledge and truth, even when it comes to such taken-for-granted and naturalized ideas as sex, are constructed in and through discourses and performative acts that are affected by, and in turn affect, relations of power. Foucault (1978) writes about sexuality, and how the heterosexual, reproductive and medicojuridical hegemonies impose an artificial binary relation between the sexes that suppress the subversive multiplicity of sexualities. According to Judith Butler (1990, 32) Foucault’s genealogical inquiry exposes how the regulation of sexual experience is achieved by stating the discrete categories of sex as foundational and causal functions within any discursive accounts of sexuality. What is seen as a “cause” of sexual experience is then revealed as an “effect” (ibid. 32).

Foucault's work has been criticized for not accounting for gender, more specifically feminine gender. The subject of this thesis being women and their sporting bodies, I feel that it is important then to bring forth Judith Butler's ideas about the performativity of gender.

Butler (1990) sets out to radically alter the categories of gender and sex as a starting point to eliminating gender oppression. She sees the power inequity being embedded in the belief and language systems that shape interpretations of experience. Butler wants to eliminate the gender/sex distinction as she points out that it would make no sense to define gender as a cultural interpretation of sex, when sex itself is a gendered category. She writes that gender cannot be conceived as a cultural inscription of pre-given "natural" sex. Gender is not to culture as sex is to nature, gender is also the discursive means for the construction of "natural sex" which is produced and established as "pre-discursive", prior to culture. (Ibid. 10) Naturalized knowledge of gender is, according to her, a violent circumscription of reality. "Naturalness" is constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex.

Butler (1990) sees gender as repeated stylization of the body. (Ibid. 45.) According to Butler, gendered bodies are "styles of the flesh". Gender is a corporeal style, and an "act", which is both intentional and performative, where performativity suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning. (Ibid. 190.) What appears as substance is a constructed identity, and a performative accomplishment. There is then no gender identity behind the expressions of gender. Identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results. (Ibid. 192.) Butler writes that gender identity is a personal/cultural history of received meanings, subject to a set of imitative practices, which refer laterally to other imitations and construct the illusion of a primary and interior gendered self. (Ibid. 188.) The body itself is a construction, as are the myriad "bodies" that constitute the domain of gendered subjects (ibid. 12).

Butler has been criticized for not accounting for the materiality of bodies when she points out that neither sex or gender exist outside performance and discourses. However, her work seems to aim to disrupt the normalized ways that knowledge is

produced in order to give way to new conceptualizations of identity. Iris Marion Young (2005, 9) sets out to take into account the materiality of the bodies and, following Toril Moi, suggests that the concept of gender should be replaced by the idea of a “lived body”, but still retained and repositioned for theorizing social structure. The idea of lived body is inspired by phenomenological thought and it is “a unified idea of a physical body, acting and experiencing in a specific sociocultural context; it is a body-in-situation” (ibid. 16). Young writes that a person always has to face the materiality of their body in relation to its environment. Young also notes that through the concept of the lived body the physical facts of different bodies can be taken into account without the reductionist and dichotomous implications of the category of “sex”. (Ibid. 16-17.) The lived body offers a way of articulating how persons live out their positioning in social structures, and however limited their choices are, Young writes that, each person takes up the constrained possibilities that gender structures offer in their own way, forming their own habits as variations on those possibilities, or actively trying to resist or refigure them (ibid. 25-26.)

In this thesis gender identity is then seen as performative, fluid and open to resignification. I will be using words such as female, women and femininity, because even if reinforcing the binary relation of male/female, these are the categories that the subjects of the study use themselves. Also, when we study lived experiences, theories of Foucault and Butler might appear abstract, thus we must take into consideration the lived body and the embodied experiences of the people we study. I will then also look at how the women themselves describe their embodied experiences, such as pain and strength.

2.4 Modern sport, ritual and liminality

Atkinson (2008) writes about triathletes’ experiences of sport related pain and how they construct a “pain community” through liminal activities. For Atkinson’s triathletes, endurance training and competition involves shocking the biological body beyond comfort thresholds, and they learn over time how to experience intense sport-related suffering and how to frame the suffering as personally exciting (2008, 169-172). I will

examine how these ideas apply to CrossFit, which is a physically demanding sport that also stresses the importance of community. For the examination of these communal factors that are related to experiences of pain and suffering, I will then follow Atkinson in turning to Victor Turner his ideas about liminality, *communitas* and ritual practices.

Besnier and Brownell (2012, 449) write how Turner's ideas of sport can be seen as opposed to Bourdieu's study, because sport for Turner is integrative when for Bourdieu it is divisive through social class. Besnier and Brownell call for the recuperation of the idea of sport as a ritual that creates liminal spaces in which power and inequality are temporarily sidelined when striving for *communitas* (ibid. 450-451). Anne Bolin and Jane Granskog (2003, 254) write that sport can be viewed as ritual, which they describe as an enactment of myths that serve to validate or justify cultural beliefs and practices, and a symbolic validation of group norms by individuals whose very participation in ritual acts, under some circumstances, may constitute a transcendental sacred experience. They also point to how it is important to take into account how members of specific sport communities come to share a common set of beliefs and practices that serve to define their boundaries and provide meaning for their members. These ritual sporting activities are embedded within a larger cultural framework, and the extent to which societal constraints on what is deemed acceptable behavior are reaffirmed or contested by members of the sport community. (Ibid. 254.)

Turner (1969; 1974) follows Arnold van Gennep in his analysis of rites of passage and liminality and extends these concepts to the study of performative genres in postindustrial societies. The participants in rites of passage are temporarily separated from all that identifies and constrains them within a normative reality. They are stripped down of their identity and made to undergo some ordeal of symbolic action which changes their identity when they later are reinstated, usually with exalted status, into society. During the participation in the ritual, participants are in between distinctions, beyond social sanctions and unconcerned with the mundane affairs of everyday life. Beings-in-transition are in the state of "liminality". Roles and rules of everyday life are suspended or inverted in that stage of in-betweenness. This is also where *communitas* emerges, in the context of antistructural suspension of the ordinary. *Communitas* exists in contrast to social structure, as an alternative and more "liberated" way of being

socially human, with dissolution of role-sets, statuses and duties. In liminality people "play" with the elements of the familiar and defamiliarize them. (Turner, 1974.)

Turner has caused confusion with his later addition to the study of liminality, by applying a new concept of liminoid genres. These are the performances and practices that have liminal qualities but belong to modern complex societies' leisure genres. Turner (1974) writes that in tribal societies liminal phenomena are required to perform a functional role, when its reversals and inversions compensate for the rigidities or unfairness of normative structure, and what might seem as subversive, is actually for the maintenance of that social structure. Turner points out how in industrial society the rites of passage form no longer suffices for total societies, but there exists multiple optional, liminoid genres of literature, drama and sport, in the sphere of leisure. This is where "play" is at work as experimentation with potential alternatives, which create possibilities for subversion of structure. (Ibid. 83.) As Andrew D Spiegel (2011, 13) notes, Turner's criteria for distinguishing the liminal genres from liminoid is based on the ideas of liminal as "super-functional" for the maintenance of social structure, and liminoid as having the potential to produce revolutionary change. Liminal genres, according to Turner, are a collective concern in connection with life-cycle processes and events, when liminoid genres occur out of the interest of individuals (ibid.). Turner (1974, 68) writes that sports such as football, and games such as chess, can be hard and exacting and governed by rules and routines, but since they are optional, they are part of an individual's freedom and his growing self-mastery, even self-transcendence.

There have been opposing views of sport as ritual, and J. Lowell Lewis (2008, 41) offers a revision of Turner's work and its shortcomings. Lewis suggests that liminoid genres should be called ritual-like, and he also points out that sport is closer to play than ritual. For Lewis play is under-valued as it has a significant role in life. Play is something that humans share with animals when ritual is a human creation. He also critiques Turner's generalized use of liminality to cover all types of transitions and rituals. (Ibid. 49.) Lewis' view of sport as play is however problematic when looking at the seriousness of sport that Sharon Rowe (2008) points to, as she goes in the opposite direction with her criticism of Turner's liminal/liminoid division. Rowe (2008, 127) writes that modern sport is a genuinely liminal phenomena and a powerful modern ritual phenomena. Modern industrial societies are often thought of as empty of ritual, thus

empty of genuinely liminal phenomena, and Rowe views sporting events as critical to the role liminality plays in our collective reflexivity and in supporting a context for metacommunication (128-129). She sees liminality as a dynamic core within which cultures produce, reproduce and store possibilities of social action and being (ibid. 130). Liminal and liminoid are separated by Turner on the basis of social structure. Turner sees ancient sports as highly ritualized phenomena connected and experienced in a broader religious context, and modern sports on the other hand as secular, although historically connected to ancient forms. Rowe argues that this secularization has not completely compromised the essence of ritual liminality, and points to how through athletes' efforts in Olympic Games and other global events, we witness a symbolic representation of ourselves in defeat and in sublime transcendence. (Ibid. 133-136.) Athletes become larger-than-life symbols that gain their meaning and significance from the imagination and aspiration of the collective. (Ibid.) Rowe sees sport, opposed to Turner, as conservative of traditional social and cultural values that rarely serve as a platform for explicit social critique.

Turner's (1974) division, does not seem to be as restrictive as Rowe makes it to be, when he points out that sport and other performance are not completely separated from ritual. Turner writes that liminoid resembles liminal, without being identical to it. They share the feature of playfulness from which emerge new, expressive possibilities and modes of self-representation. Liminoid phenomena also encourages public reflexivity by representing ourselves to ourselves in a context that accommodates critical scrutiny and personal, if not public, renewal. (Ibid.) However, Turner's categorical division creates a problematic, and in Spiegel's (2011, 11) words "by now passé", binarism of primitive-versus-modern societies. Also Brownell (2001, 33) has noted that this type of distinction was characteristic of modernization theory popular at the time when Turner developed his ideas of liminal and liminoid genres. According to Brownell, this attempt to draw a clear line between traditional/primitive and modern societies is flawed, as "Eastern, Western, ancient, and contemporary sports are all frequently linked to rituals that address cosmic issues" (ibid. 33). Tradition does not die out in modern societies, but it is reinvented and reincorporated into new forms (ibid. 38). Hence, when Brownell (2001, 33) speaks of the rituals and liminal genres, she is speaking of liminality in *modern* society.

Spiegel (2011) on the other hand, points to the usefulness of Turner's idea of liminoid genres, once appropriately revised. He thinks that an alternative way of understanding the liminal-liminoid distinction, is to see them as opposite ends of a continuum stretching between two ideal types of social situations. He points out that all real such social situations demonstrate aspects of both liminal and liminoid within them. (Ibid. 11.) The structural binary of Turner's distinction should then be replaced with a more processual take on his ideas to be able to use them as an analytical tool that is more fluid and malleable (ibid. 13).

In this thesis I will then explore the liminal/liminoid qualities of the CrossFit practice. This is not done by examining *either* liminal *or* liminoid qualities, instead I following Spiegel (2011), and will look at how CrossFit encompasses qualities from both of these categories, as it is experienced by the female CrossFitters through their practices in the sport. Also, when used in this thesis, the word "modern" is not used in opposition to "traditional", but it is simply used to describe phenomena situated in post-industrial, capitalist society. As Dyck (2004, 3-8) notes, anthropological ways of dealing with ritual, symbolic analysis, social drama and *communitas* can be employed with considerable effect to capture and explain aspects of embodied and verbal behavior by athletes and spectators of sport. I will then also look at the way the community is formed in CrossFit and how it relates to the embodied experiences of pain and "flow".

Flow is Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's concept that describes a state of experience, where "everything clicks" and one is "in the zone" (Hunter and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, 12). Turner's has noted that liminal/liminoid experiences are connected to the experiences of "flow". Turner points to six elements of flow: The experience of merging action and awareness, centering of attention, loss of ego, being in control of one's actions and of the environment, clear unambiguous feedback, and no need for goals or rewards outside itself. (1974, 87-89) Flow for Turner is one of the ways that structure may be transformed into *communitas*. It is a technique through which people seek unmediated communion with one another, even though severe subscription to rules is the frame in which this communion may possibly be induced (ibid. 89). Hunter and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) point out that flow can be most easily experienced when practicing sport, and they then direct the focus on the importance of first-person quality of experience (ibid. 23). They point out how flow's merging of action and awareness is

a prime example of Merleau-Ponty's "being in the world" in that there is no separation of mind-body (ibid. 15).

2.5 Consumer choice, health and fitness culture

Turner (1974) sees sport in modern consumer cultures as belonging to the sphere of leisure. He writes that leisure-time is freedom from institutional obligations, freedom from the forced chronologically regulated rhythms of factory and office, and freedom to generate new symbolic worlds of entertainment. Leisure can be conceived of as a betwixt-and-between, a neither-this-nor-that domain between two spells of work, between occupational and familial and civic activity. For Turner, it is an area that transcends social structural limitations, and is imbued more thoroughly with pleasure than work. (Ibid. 68.) The effort of sport and the discipline of training is then chosen voluntarily, in the expectation of enjoyment, and sport is a commodity that one chooses and pays for (ibid. 69-86). Rowe (2008, 143) opposes that it is not possible to separate playing sports from the social obligation to participate, to distinguish the choice of the individual from the push and pull of larger, unarticulated collective aims. Sports blend work into play and play into work in a manner that renders it difficult to see where the two can be separated (ibid. 143).

Turner (1974) has also pointed out how work and leisure interact. He writes that "the Protestant Ethic" of Northern European and North American societies influenced individuals' experience in a sense that it made leisure "of the nature of work" (ibid. 69-71). "Betterment" then implies self-discipline, and self-examination and hard work (ibid. 70). Still, Turner (1974) emphasizes the voluntary nature of sports, and writes that it does not matter that sports are governed by rules and routines even more stringent than those of the work situation, but, since they are optional, they are part of individual's freedom. (Ibid. 69-71.)

Roberta Sassatelli (2010, 18) writes about fitness⁷ culture as part of contemporary consumer culture and points out, following Foucault, how techniques of the body have extended from work, punishment and education to the spheres of recreation and leisure. She brings forth the ambiguity of choice as she notes that imagining a sovereign consumer who makes a rational choice, or rejecting it altogether with notions such as “induced needs” or “false consciousness” are not sufficient when describing the lived experience in which the boundaries between production and consumption seem to be shifting, and to an extent, blurred. Consumption is a practice where consumers and producers are intermingled by consumers being active producers of the consumer culture they take part in, and producers consuming the same products themselves. (Ibid. 200.) According to her, a consumer choice is then a “hybrid mix of decisions, constraints, habits, contingencies, aspirations, interactions, relations”, it is an ongoing process, which is not beyond distinction and free (ibid. 199-206). People’s choice is to realize themselves as authentic subjects through an activity which is constructed as natural and moral (ibid. 15). However, consumers also wish to enjoy themselves, seek variety and novelty and can be persuaded but not coerced (ibid. 206).

Consumer choices are made in a culture where two opposing mandates, discipline and release, are at work (Crawford, 1985; 2000; 2006). In Sassatelli’s (2010, 20) study this is evident in how the contemporary fitness clubs put bodies to work through disciplinary techniques that are framed as fun and pleasurable. Sassatelli sees fitness gyms as sites where body discipline and consumership intersect. Gyms are organized via commercial relations, and they are also part of the governmental logic of promoting physical efficiency and health. (Ibid.) Foucault (1977) writes how social agencies regulate the body and biological processes such as health and fitness through the power embedded in the social structure. Through the internalizing of discourses of the medical knowledge and techniques of the body and self, an individual then becomes an expert in self-discipline.

⁷ Sassatelli (2010, 6) writes that a number of activities can be seen as belonging under the label “fitness”. Sports such as swimming, oriental techniques such as yoga, leisure activities such as orienteering, walking, gardening and dancing, physical activities such as jogging, and even fitness exercises performed at home.

Crawford has studied health in neoliberal society, and brings forth an idea of health as a super-value (Crawford, 1985; 2000; 2006). He calls the emergence of health consciousness in the 1970s as “healthism” (2006, 410-411). Crawford (1985, 62-63) writes that health as a cultural construct is a particularly important concept in the modern west and it has become a responsibility of an individual. In the secular, materialist cultures health has acquired great symbolic importance and several health discourses, like medical, political, popular and personal, exist. Crawford points out how the underlying assumption of medical thinking, which is the body as an object of rational control, is treated as unproblematic. Health discourses that reproduce internalized medical knowledge represent a way of experiencing our bodies, “selves” and our world, and health promotion can be seen as being part of “managing” the individual bodies, separated from both mind and society. Crawford writes that when the macro-conditions that affect health appear to be out of control, self-control over personal behaviors that also affect health becomes the only remaining option. (Ibid. 73-74.)

Deborah Lupton (2013) sheds light on how far people in modern societies have gone in the managing of their own health with using technology for voluntary self-tracking strategies. This can be seen as a prime example of the technologies of self that Foucault (1977) writes about. Lupton (2013, 393-394) shows how people have started to monitor themselves with mobile and wearable digital devices that collect data on one's bodily functions and everyday activities. She notes that in healthism individual's everyday activities and thoughts are continually directed towards this goal, and mobile digital devices extend the capacities of the body by supplying data of body's limits and capabilities that can then be worked upon. These devices direct gaze to the body and provide knowledge that offers a means by which illness and disease may be prevented. (Ibid. 397- 396.) Medical technologies have altered how the body and health are conceptualized, articulated and portrayed. The body/self becomes both the subject and product of "scientific" measurement and interpretation through numbers and visual data displays. (Ibid. 398-399.)

In health-valuing culture people assess themselves and others by how well they succeed or fail in adopting healthy practices (Crawford, 2006). Health consciousness has become unavoidable, when health related information is everywhere in the media.

Health promotion and health education focusing on lifestyle and behavior changes also continues to grow. (Ibid. 415.) Medical knowledge influences the ideas of health but the proliferation of discourses and meanings of health cannot be contained by medical practice. Health is then metaphorical, absorbing and expressing a range of meanings found throughout culture. (Ibid. 405.) As Crawford (2006, 404) writes: “Health is meaningfully and emotionally charged fixation, a goal and a source of anxiety, a value for self and others, integral to identity, a state of being that is continually assessed and the organizing concept for a vast organization of social action.”

Turner (1974, 68) sees leisure-time as possessing freedom to enter, or even generate new symbolic worlds of entertainment and sports, freedom to play, and freedom from the forced, chronologically regulated rhythms of factory and office and a chance to recuperate. However, leisure in modern capitalist culture can be seen as part of the interplay of power relations between opposing mandates of production and consumption. Work and play are then joined together and experienced in terms of discipline and release. Consumer choice is not simply a freedom to choose and create, as it is always restricted by the provided possibilities. Nevertheless, like Sassatelli (2010) brings forth, it cannot be seen as completely restrictive either, as consumers and producer are intermingled, and, like Crawford (1985, 2006) points out, able to create new meanings. For the present study, I will then look at consumer choice as an ongoing process, and a possibility to create new meanings, and I will see what meanings the female CrossFitters give their practices, and how these contradictions of two opposing mandates are experienced and negotiated in their everyday life.

2.6 Female bodies and sport

A myriad of research done in social sciences about women, bodies and sport have used a Foucauldian framework. Different sports and fitness trends have been looked at from a feminist cultural studies perspective, and what has remained at the center of this research, has been the question of whether these exercise forms are helping women in the quest of gender equality.

Blanchard (1995) writes that in the United States the inequality of male and female access to sport participation opportunities persisted into the mid-1900s, and during the early decades of the 20th century women only tended to play a supportive role. They sat in the sidelines rather than run down the field and lead cheers rather than captain teams. With the assumption that the public viewed sport as a male institution, the funding for women's sport was far from those necessary for maintaining men's sport programs. During the late twentieth century the sports opportunities for women have been broadened because of the pressure from feminist groups, actions by courts and federal legislation. There are more women's sport programs, teams and leagues and the image of the female athlete is changing. Despite the positive changes, inequities still persist. Blanchard notes that the problem with women and sport has been not so much the participation, but the relative emphasis and importance of male and female sport. The tendency has been for the society to value sportsmen above sportswomen and to hold in highest esteem those sports that pit men against men.⁸ The role played by women in society's sport activities is a product of the role of women in the broader worlds of technology, subsistence and economy. (Ibid. 218.)

Krane et al. (2004, 315), in their study about female athletes' body image in the U.S, write that sportswomen live in two cultures, the sport culture and the larger social culture, wherein social and sport ideals clash. In order to succeed in sports, female athletes must develop characteristics associated with masculinity such as strength, assertiveness, independence and competitiveness. When these characteristics are combined with the ideals of hegemonic femininity, a paradox of dueling identities is created. Sometimes these two identities are kept separate but at other times they merge. "Being a girl" is not possible in the context of performing well at sports, and the sporting female bodies are frequently sexualized. (Ibid. 326-327.) Studies in bodybuilding have also shown that the sporting bodies of male and female are treated differently⁹. Amy Scott (2011) writes that the athletic accomplishments of female bodybuilders are diminished by fragmenting the female body into the sexual aspects of femininity that are then used as an advertising prop. Bobbi A. Knapp (2014, 2) points to how sport influences our understanding of femininity, and the women are embodying

⁸ As evident in media's focus on men's participation in sports such as ice hockey, rugby, football and soccer.

⁹ See for example Scott 2011, Kinnunen 2001 and Mansfield et al. 1993.

their weakness and subservience to male dominance through diminutive physical size and underdeveloped musculature. This leads to gender specific fitness goals and women's conformity to these goals reaffirms sexual and gender differentiation (ibid.). Scott (2011, 75-77) writes how a double standard exists when it comes to muscle even within men's and women's bodybuilding: men are rewarded for maximum muscle and women are not. Men's athletic performances are glorified in the media for their power and strength, while women's athletic abilities are obscured by focusing on their beauty and sex appeal (ibid.).

Feminist scholar Susan Bordo (1993) explains the vulnerability of the female bodies to cultural manipulation by noting that besides having bodies, women have also been associated with the body. The body has been considered women's "sphere" in family life, mythology and in scientific, philosophical and religious ideology, and over the past one hundred years the female body has emerged as a central strategy in the maintenance of power relations between the sexes. (Ibid. 143.) Bordo uses Foucault's methodological tools in constructing an analysis of the contemporary practices of diet and exercise. According to Bordo (1993), dieting, first being part of religious life and rituals, became part of the middle-class preoccupations in the late nineteenth century. Body management and the pursuit of an idealized physical weight and shape changed from being a project in service of soul to a project in service of body. (Ibid. 185.) This change coincided with the rise of consumer culture. Social power had come to be less dependent on the accumulation of material wealth and more connected to the ability to control and manage the labor and resources of others. In a culture of overabundance excess bodyweight came to be seen as reflecting moral or personal inadequacy, and personal body management became intimately connected with the management of the larger "social body" through consumer culture (ibid. 192-199, see also Foucault 1977; 1978).

Foucault (1978) has shown how hysterization of women's bodies in the eighteenth century meant that through medical practices women's bodies were made sexual and then placed in communication with the social body. Sexualized feminine bodies are produced through the disciplinary technology that creates individualized bodies that are endowed with capacities, but also through the regulatory technology, where the individual bodies are replaced by general biological processes of a species-body. (Ibid.)

According to Bordo (1993) it is the everyday deployment of mass cultural representations of masculinity, femininity, beauty and success that homogenize and smooth out the racial, ethnic and sexual differences that disturb Anglo-Saxon, heterosexual expectations and identifications. These images present in media normalize, and they function as models against which the self continually measures, judges, “disciplines” and “corrects” itself. (Ibid. 24-25.) Our cultural conceptions of the body, norms of beauty, models of health, scientific, philosophic and aesthetic representations, can be seen as forming a set of practical rules and regulations through which the living body is trained and shaped into becoming a useful body (ibid. 181).

According to Bordo (1993), diet and exercise are practices that train female body in docility and obedience to cultural demands, while at the same time they can also be experienced in terms of power and control. Power and pleasure do not necessarily cancel each other out, but feeling “in control” is always the product of power relations (ibid. 27). Scott (2011) asks, whether women’s bodybuilding is rejecting the hegemonic femininity norm or if it is simply another representation of the bodywork that is required by women. She refers to Bordo when she points out that the body dissatisfaction that bodybuilding practices create, shows it does not matter whether the goal is muscle perfection or slender perfection, the female body is expected to fulfill the gendered role of feminine beauty perfection. Through hair extensions, excessive tanning, unhealthy dieting and even plastic surgery demanded for the competitions, female bodybuilders conform to gender ideals. (Ibid. 81.)

Anne Bolin (2003) writes about contradictions of femininity in bodybuilding. She sees women’s bodybuilding as a postmodern phenomenon in which the dominant gender schema of naturalness is contested through a blending and blurring of gender boundaries. (Ibid. 107-129.) Scott (2011) agrees with the argument of resistance when considering individual self-perception and influence on gender ideals. She writes how women bodybuilders feel that they are making an active change in how the female body is manipulated and perceived and that it offers them a platform for resistance to patriarchal norms. She concludes that bodybuilding can then be seen as both, compliance and resistance: it challenges and conforms to gender ideals that confront women on a daily basis. (Ibid. 82-83.)

Reischer and Koo (2004, 315) point out that women have learned to appropriate the body's symbolism to achieve their own ends, even if it is within the existing social structures that ultimately index power relations. They think that the ideal female form and women's bodies do more than reflect women's position in the society; they also offer a powerful tool for negotiating, redefining and reconceptualizing that position. Limitations imposed on women through the body ideal could then be symbolically overturned. (Ibid. 315.) As Bordo (1993) notes, the power relations are always spawning new forms of culture and subjectivity, and also new opportunities for transformation. Dominant forms and institutions are continually being penetrated and reconstructed by values, styles and knowledges that have been developing and gathering strength, energy, and distinctiveness at the margins. Transformations emerge gradually, through local minute shifts in power, and they are often, paradoxically, served through conformity to prevailing norms. (Bordo, 1993; Foucault, 1977.)

In her study of women triathletes, Granskog (2003, 34) writes that the women she interviewed started an exercise program as a method to lose weight, but once "hooked" into an athletic lifestyle, a sense of strength and power that they acquired made them feel empowered. Krane et al. (2004, 326) write that female athletes of their study had worked hard to be strong, and they were proud of their efforts. They expressed empowerment, satisfaction and enjoyment as a result of participating in a physically demanding sport (ibid.).

Pirkko Markula (1995, 441-442) directs our focus on the lived experiences of women and points out that instead of classifying women's practices exclusively into resistance and oppression it is more fruitful to concentrate on the richness of everyday experiences. It is no longer enough to label women's body practices only as disciplining or as empowering (ibid. 427.) Markula writes that our understanding of the body is formed within such discourses as health, medicine, and femininity, but women actively make sense of social world and construct different meaning in different social contexts (ibid. 429). Also Laura F. Chase (2006) points out how women and their sporting bodies are shaped by multiple and competing discourses and disciplinary processes. The female rugby players of her study resist disciplinary processes of femininity but at the same time take part in the disciplinary processes of competitive sport. (Ibid. 229-230.) The women exhibit a certain degree of freedom to shape themselves through resisting

discourse of the ideal feminine body, but as participants in competitive sport they are also clearly constructed as docile athletic bodies (ibid. 235).

These studies of different sporting practices and how they are lived and experienced by women participants show, as Maylon T. Hanold (2010, 166) writes, the ways in which participants actively make sense of discourses and construct their sporting “selves” and bodies in unique ways. What is then important for the present study is to look at the meaning construction, and the negotiations of practices of the female CrossFitters of this study. I will also be interested to see how the hegemonic beauty ideals are talked about, and how the women feel that their own bodies are in relation to those ideals. What is then negotiated, and what is seen as important?

2.7 CrossFit

Marcelle C. Dawson (2015, 1) writes that considering the popularity of CrossFit all over the world, the dearth of research into its history, development, promotional culture and social aspects is striking. Bobbi A. Knapp’s studies of CrossFit present a feminist perspective. She examines the mediated representations of gender through a qualitative content analysis of 2166 pictures included in the CrossFit Journal¹⁰ (Knapp, 2014), and in her other study she uses a feminist geographical point of view to look at how CrossFit box¹¹ is a space where gender is not just reproduced, but also resisted (Knapp, 2015). While both of these studies offer compelling perspectives, the latter is closer to my research in methodology and focus. Knapp’s (2015) research offers a good starting point for my study as she examines how gender is given meaning to through sociospatial interactions within a CrossFit box. However, I will extend my study outside the box and see how these meanings are experienced by the women in their everyday lives.

¹⁰ Knapp’s study included all issues of the CrossFit Journal from 2002, 2006, 2008 and 2012.

¹¹ CrossFit gyms are called boxes. This is because CrossFit gyms are basic, box-like, often industrial, spaces.

Knapp (2015) offers also some insight on the construction of masculinity in a CrossFit box. She notes that in some ways the traditional notions of gender were maintained. The most overt way was naturalizing the differences between women and men through prescribing different weights for male and female participants, referencing to males' natural ability to lift more than females (ibid. 49). However this was seen by the CrossFitters as creating an equitable competitive environment (ibid. 50). Hence, she points out that male CrossFitters were encouraged to move beyond sexist notions of male physical superiority and embrace competition among women as their equals. Also, she brings forth how the hegemonic ideas of masculinity and femininity were resisted through the lack of sexed spatial division, making a CrossFit box she studied a space of resistance. (Ibid. 52.)

Leslie Heywood's (2015) study is based on affective neuroscience. She uses a CrossFit documentary *Every Second Counts*¹² as her material to show how what she calls the "CrossFit Sensorium" represents a particular manifestation of embodiment encountered within and beyond the moving image (ibid. 21). Heywood's research brings forth the way CrossFit uses visual material and digital media to the formation of virtual communities that then become embodied in the practice. The visual aspect of CrossFit, albeit important for the phenomenon, is not the focus of the present inquiry. I find it important to concentrate on female CrossFitter's own experiences and examine what are the meanings they give their practice.

Dawson (2015) examines the idea of the CrossFit "cult" and argues for a better understanding of the phenomenon using Susie Scott's concept "reinventive institution". Reinventive institution places an emphasis on voluntarism, performative regulation and mutual surveillance. According to Dawson, this makes it a multi-dimensional analytical tool for understanding how power, identity construction and self-transformation operate in CrossFit. Dawson is interested in the experiences of CrossFitters and uses books¹³ written by avid CrossFitters as her material. She described her own experience with CrossFit as negative and short-lived. (Ibid. 1-2.) I will use Dawson's ideas to describe

¹² Directors Sevan Matossian and Carey Peterson, USA, 2009.

¹³ Belger, A. (2012): *The Power of Community: CrossFit and the Force of Human Connection*. Murphy, TJ (2012): *Inside the Box: How CrossFit Shredded the Rules, Stripped Down the Gym and Rebuilt my Body*. Herz, JC (2014): *Learning to Breathe Fire: The Rise of CrossFit and the Primal Future of Fitness*.

the process of voluntary self-transformation, but it seems like the concept of reinventive institution does not leave room for the affectional and the anti-structural elements that emerge in CrossFit ritual and are better explained by using Victor Turner's concepts of "liminality" and "communitas". Also, what Dawson (2015, 11) refers to as generic identities, "McSelves", produced by CrossFit, is experienced by female CrossFitters with much more complexity and fluidity, as they negotiate the diets and other practices of health as not just acts of self-discipline but also as acts of release (Crawford, 1985 and 2006).

I will then focus on the feminine lived body, as the experiences of the female CrossFitters take the center stage in the analysis. I follow Kinnunen (2001), Markula (2003), Granskog (2003) and others in studying the lived experiences of the people who practice sport and focusing on the meaning they give their practices. This means looking at the body as a symbol that is functional, thinking, experiencing and performing. Lived experiences are subjective and the meaning is in the embodied experience and actions. (Kinnunen, 2001, 16.)

Looking at subjective bodily experiences, however, does not mean that we can disregard the cultural context where this phenomenon is situated, and CrossFit can be examined in line with other sport and fitness trends, that have been taken up for the attainment of health. "Healthist" ideas are prevalent in contemporary Western cultures as different practices are carried out, and categories of health constructed through the adoption of health discourse (Crawford, 1985; 2006). In this framework it is interesting to see what meaning the female CrossFitters of this study give their practices of health.

Bourdieu's (1977) extension of the concept of habitus has been used in the study of sport to describe how culture is inscribed onto the body through bodily practices. Bourdieu's ideas have had a deep impact on understanding of human behavior in social sciences, but his concept of habitus has also been seen as static. His joining together social class with specific sporting practices is not explored further in this study about CrossFit as I turn to look at CrossFit as an integrative practice that creates a sense of community in its participants. Besnier and Brownell (2012) point out that Bourdieu sees sport as divisive, when Turner's (1974) theory of communitas that rises out of liminal activities, can be taken up to examine the integrative side of sport. I will then see how

CrossFit has characteristics of liminal/liminoid phenomena. I will also examine how Turner's ideas of joining together *communitas* and flow is manifested in the context of CrossFit.

Women's sporting bodies have been studied extensively in social sciences through a Foucauldian framework. As Chase (2006) notes, Foucault's theoretical concepts have advanced understanding of the cultural production of diverse and normalized bodies. Foucault's (1977; 1978; 1980; 1996) work has been criticized for its neglect of the ways gender impacts issues of the body and the significance of sporting bodies. Chase (2006) then suggests the combination of feminist theory and Foucauldian theoretical approaches (ibid. 233). Foucauldian body has also been seen as abstract, ahistorical, a conceptual body that is disembodied. To overcome this over abstraction, an approach that is influenced by phenomenological ideas of embodiment and the symbolic studies can be applied.

Some of the Foucauldian studies on women and sport have emphasized women's conformity to beauty ideals and normalizations through which their bodies become "docile" (Bordo, 1997). Other's concentrate on the empowerment that women experience by participating in sport (Granskog, 2003; Krane et al. 2004). Through joining the theories that focus on the discourses of power and the lived experiences of individuals I arrive at looking at the female experiences of CrossFit as a complex process where discourses are negotiated and experienced in unique ways (Markula, 1995 and 2003; Chase, 2006; Hanold, 2010). I will see how the female CrossFitters talk about muscular bodies, and the beauty ideals. Gender identity is seen, following Butler (1990), as constructed and performative, still not forgetting the material reality that the women live in and experience through their "lived bodies" (Young, 2005).

3 Methodology and ethical considerations

My field research took place in the United States. I conducted interviews and took part in a beginner's Jump Start course for one month in August, 2014 in Portland, Oregon. During that time I conducted twelve interviews and completed the beginner's course in the CrossFit affiliate CrossFit Portland. A Jump Start course is a four-week long CrossFit course for beginners that teaches the techniques of basic movements and introduces the high intensity workouts to the participants. This prepares the participants mentally and physically for the actual CrossFit classes. After the completion of a beginner's course one has the permission to take part in the daily classes offered at the box. The Jump Start class was organized two times a week, 75 minutes at a time, for four weeks. So two women, ages 33 and 49, and I met our coach altogether eight times. In between the Jump Start classes I spent time interviewing people, watching classes and having conversations with people about CrossFit any opportunity I had.

Participant observations is a big part of ethnographic fieldwork. Kendall Blanchard and Alyce Cheska (1985) explain that participant observation is a methodology where researcher participates in the lives of the people being studied while maintaining a scientific objectivity as an observer. Participant observation involves immersing oneself in a culture and learning to remove yourself every day from that immersion so you can intellectualize what you've seen and heard, put it into perspective, and write about it convincingly (Bernard 2006, 344). The fieldworker becomes a scientific instrument and must rely on her/his personality in the process (Eriksen 2001).

I researched different boxes in the Portland area and chose CrossFit Portland as a site for my research because they are the first CrossFit gym in Oregon and one of the first 30 affiliates in the world. CrossFit Portland was established in 2005 by Scott Hagnas.¹⁴ After I arrived to Portland I was also invited to another CrossFit gym by a family friend who had started to practice the sport and was excited to show me the community that she was a part of. The second site for my research was CrossFit Wilsonville, co-owned by two couples Will and Janessa Brindza and Rich and Megan Anderson.¹⁵ I didn't

¹⁴ <http://www.crossfitportland.com/start/facilities/>

¹⁵ <http://www.crossfitwilsonville.com/coaches>

participate in any of the workouts at CrossFit Wilsonville, but I visited the box, watched classes from the sidelines and interviewed people. I also had the opportunity to interview one of the owners, Janessa Brindza, who is also a competitive athlete.

The length of the period of participant observation depends on the project. In my study what made it easier for me was that I already knew the language and by taking part in the beginner's course in CrossFit practice I gained access to the world of CrossFit instantly. However, my own practice was limited whilst in the field because of the structure of classes, where as a beginner one has to learn all the basic movements and master the technique first, before being able to take part in the daily exercise classes, which are called WODs. In the month of fieldwork that I conducted in the United States, I was only able to take part in the beginner's course, and not the daily practices. This meant that my own role as a researcher went from being what Bernard (2006) calls observing participant, partaking in the class as an "insider", to participating observer, more visible "outsider", who would be observing the class from the sidelines. The changes in the role also helped me to move between emic and etic positions, emic being the point of view of the people one studies, and etic the analytical perspective of an anthropologist (Eriksen 2001). After my fieldwork in the United States I have continued CrossFit practice by taking part in WODs at a local CrossFit gym in Helsinki, my hometown. This continuing practice then gives me embodied knowledge of the experiences of the female CrossFitters that I can use as a background for my study.

Bolin and Granskog (2003) write that for an ethnography of sport and truly reflexive ethnography an experiential approach, which means not just the observed visual and verbal but also the somatic bodily experience of the activity as well, is a valuable tool. Being part of the group we study, as a co-participant, and being involved in the process of developing knowledge through participation that includes time-depth and somatic experience in the activity, the researcher can include embodied knowledge in their repertoire of research tools. (Ibid. 11-12.) Being whom one studies, however, creates a situation where the ethnographer must slide in and out of being a participant and an observer, and this brings forth the difficulty of familiarization. The critical distancing necessary for reflective analysis is then especially crucial. (Ibid. 13.) One of the major limitations, according to Granskog (2003, 30) is that the researcher as an insider is too

close to the subject matter and may for that reason overlook key dimensions, especially negative ones.

My own experience in practicing CrossFit brings me bodily knowledge and understanding of the processes that the interviewees go through, it gives me rapport with the female CrossFitters, which can be seen as translating into more open conversation about the subject matter. The problem that this position poses is one of being too close to the subject to be able to see it objectively. In the writing stage of this thesis, however, I have tried to take some distance from my own practice and have concentrated on what was said in the interviews to see how the informants of this study experienced their practice.

I conducted semi-structured interviews¹⁶ that are open ended, but follow a general script and covers a list of topics (Bernard, 2006, 210). The interviewees were promised anonymity and I refer to them by their pseudonyms, with the exception of the owner of CrossFit Wilsonville, who agreed to the use of her real name. I conducted ten interviews with women who practice CrossFit. These were one-on-one interviews with women aged between 29 and 52. The participants had practiced CrossFit varying lengths of time from two weeks to five and half years. Two of these women worked as CrossFit coaches. In addition to these interviews that I will be using as the main data for my analysis, I also interviewed women who do not practice CrossFit, to get an outsiders' point of view to the phenomenon. One of these interviews was a one-on-one interview, and the other one was a group interview with three people. The length of all of the interviews ranged from 30 minutes to an hour, and the group interview was an hour and 20 minutes long. The themes of the interviews were sport and exercise, diet, body and beauty ideals, these being based on the previous research on women, bodies and sport. I also asked CrossFit specific questions. I asked women about their experiences with CrossFit and their likes and dislikes about it.

In all of the interviews I also used a photo elicitation method where I showed the women three different types of health and fitness magazines¹⁷ and asked which one of

¹⁶ See Appendix for a list of interviews.

¹⁷ See Figures 1-3 for the magazine covers used in the interviews.

the covers is most appealing to them in terms of the images and the texts. I gave them the chance to browse through the magazines themselves to see what thoughts and ideas would come up from the texts and images in them. I did this at the end of each interview so that bringing out the magazines would not affect the answers to all the other questions. The magazines were randomly selected in August 2014 from a large book store's health and lifestyle section to represent different sports. Douglas Harper (2002, 13) writes that the photo elicitation method enlarges the possibilities of conventional empirical research in that it evokes information, feelings and memories that are due to the photograph's particular form of representation. Used as an addition to a conventional semi-structured interview, I noticed that it worked as reaffirming the already stated, but also as deepening the level of conversation and making it easier to talk about the visual aspects of femininity, such as body ideals.

All interviews were recorded with interviewee's consent and later transcribed. Transcribed interviews were then coded by reading the texts multiple times to determine what words stand out as having positive and negative value to the interviewees. Then these words were divided into categories, which then made up the main categories that are used as the themes in the final analysis of this thesis. Each of the chapters five, six and seven are dedicated to a thorough analysis of one of these themes and the conversations and meanings related to it. The themes are: Strength, health and community.

In addition to the interviews I had countless informal conversations with people about CrossFit. One of them particularly worth mentioning was an hour long conversation at CrossFit Portland with J. C. Herz at the book signing for her new book "Learning to Breathe Fire; the rise of CrossFit and the primal future of fitness" (2014).

In the next chapter I will explain the CrossFit phenomenon through previous research, information I gathered from CrossFit's website and through my own participation in the practices of CrossFit.

4 CrossFit explained

CrossFit is a training method that promotes functional fitness. It was developed in the United States by Greg Glassman. Glassman (2002c) defines a CrossFitter as someone who is equal parts gymnast, Olympic weightlifter and sprinter, hence CrossFit workouts are combinations of different athletic disciplines. Glassman (2002a) explains that CrossFit is a strength and conditioning program that was developed to enhance an individual's competency to perform successfully at multiple, diverse, and randomized physical tasks. Glassman describes the ten fitness domains as: "*Cardiovascular and respiratory endurance, stamina, strength, flexibility, power, speed, coordination, agility, balance and accuracy.*" (Glassman, 2002c.) Constant variation and an interdisciplinary approach are emphasized as keys to constant progression of the CrossFit participants.

CrossFit started as a small-scale training program at Glassman's gym in Santa Cruz, California in the year 2000. He then created an online blog in 2003. On the blog daily workouts were posted and people doing those workouts could write their own results in the comment section of the page, allowing them to compare results and follow not just their own progress but also progress of others. Since then CrossFit has turned into a global, multi-million-dollar industry that Dawson (2015, 1) points out to be one of the biggest fitness trends of the twenty-first century. In 2015 CrossFit has over 11 000 affiliated gyms and more than 100 000 accredited CrossFit Level 1 trainers¹⁸ worldwide. (What is CrossFit?)

4.1 Box

CrossFit is experienced by most people who are participating in this phenomenon through the exercises they perform at their local CrossFit affiliate, which is called a box. In his article, "*The Garage Gym*" (2002b), Glassman writes how an ideal gym should be

¹⁸ CrossFit Level 1 Certificate Course is an introduction to the methodology and foundational movements of CrossFit (<https://training.crossfit.com/level-one>).

“located close to home or work, have people who you would like to work out with, be well equipped and clean, not overly crowded, manned by knowledgeable staff and be supportive of hard-core fitness”. Glassman encourages people to build their own garage gyms and gives instruction on how it can be done (ibid.). Many CrossFit affiliates have followed these instructions and started their businesses in garages or warehouses with minimalist equipment and collecting knowledge and instruction from the CrossFit company’s website. Here I will examine in closer detail one of the boxes I got acquainted with in the course of my fieldwork.

CrossFit Portland is situated in an industrial area in the city of Portland, Oregon. The owner of CrossFit Portland, Scott Hagnas, said in the autumn of 2014, that approximately 60 per cent of the clientele are women, and 40 per cent are men. The box is almost a literal representation of a large box, 5,600 square-feet of mostly open space. You walk in through a door of what looks like a warehouse building and in front of you on the right opens up the exercise space. Straight ahead of you are the stairs that lead up to the offices and on the left there is a small area where you can sit down, and read magazines if you wish. The only chairs in the whole space are also situated in this small area. This is also the area where the Jump Start course gathered in the morning to go through the movements that we would perform that day. The coach of the Jump Start course wrote the names of the exercises on a whiteboard and explained what all the abbreviations meant. (See Table 1 for details.) Only after that we would move to the exercise space, where we would do the workout.

The middle of the room where the work out of the day (WOD) is performed is completely empty so that there is room to move. There is text written on the back wall with words such as “*community, excellence, challenge, welcoming, supportive, mobility, strength, addictive and accountability*”. On one side of the room there is a blackboard, where every morning the work out of the day is written and behind it a whiteboard where members’ results are posted. As Dawson (2015) writes, the presence of the whiteboard encourages CrossFitters to train harder, because it broadcasts the names and scores of everyone who worked out on a particular day. The information on the board indicates how much one lifted for the strength component, how quickly one performed certain routines and how many rounds of a particular exercise one has completed. (Ibid. 13.)

AMRAP	“As Many Rounds/Reps As Possible”; a type of workout in which an exerciser attempts to complete as many rounds or reps of an exercise or exercises in a given amount of time.
BOX	An affiliated CrossFit gym
Box jump	Jumping from the ground onto an elevated platform, typically a wooden box.
Burpee	Diving from a standing position into a push-up, then jumping up and clapping overhead.
Clean and Jerk	Pulling a barbell from ground to shoulders, then lifting it overhead with arms extended.
Deadlift	Raising a barbell from floor to hip level.
EMOM	“Every Minute On the Minute”; doing a movement or series of movements every sixty seconds.
Hero WODs	WODs formulated and named in honor of fallen soldiers, firefighters, or law enforcement officers.
Metcon	A “metabolic conditioning” WOD that alternates strength movements with cardiovascular stress.
Oly	Olympic weightlifting
PR	Personal record.
Rx’d	As prescribed, doing a WOD without modifications.
Scaled	A WOD that has been modified with the substitution of less advanced movements, lighter weight or fewer repetitions.
Tabata	A workout that employs an interval scheme consisting of 20 seconds of all-out effort alternating with 10 seconds of rest, repeated 8 times for total of 4 minutes.
The Girls	A set of Benchmark WODs with women’s names.
WOD	Workout Of the Day

Table 1: Explanation of the CrossFit terminology (Herz, 2014).

Behind the blackboard are the restrooms and changing rooms with showers for men and women. These are the only spaces in the box divided by sex. There is also a small room designated for child-care. The classes start from the blackboard where the coach explains the workout. PVC pipes are placed near the blackboard and they are used for practicing the right technique for weightlifting movements and mobility exercises. Other small pieces of equipment that are used for mobility are lacrosse balls, rubber bands, and rollers. All of these, as well as jump ropes, are neatly organized in their own place on one side of the blackboard. Opposite to this on the other side of the room are steel racks that are used for movements like pull ups, bar muscle ups, and some of the weightlifting movements such as squats and the shoulder press. Wooden rings that are used for gymnastic movements are hanging from the racks, and next to the racks hang couple of ropes from the ceiling. These are used for rope climbing. Stationed near this are weightlifting bars and color coded weight plates. On the other side next to the racks are rowing machines, and next to the rowing machines are wooden boxes that are used for the box jumps. On the opposite side of the room on the back wall there is a shelf that holds kettle bells and medicine balls that are also used in the workouts.

The way all the equipment is laid out on the sidelines makes it easy to get the equipment you need for the day's workout, and to take it back to its proper place after the exercise. It also makes the room resemble a warehouse or a garage instead of a traditional gym that is filled with a variety of training equipment. Another thing that visibly separates the box from a traditional gym is the lack of mirrors. The only mirrors in CrossFit Portland are in the changing rooms. This means that people are not checking themselves out in the mirrors while exercising, and they seem to be more concentrated on their performance. Performance is also highlighted by having a stopwatch in a visible place in purpose of timing the workouts. Floors are covered with rubber mats for protection. Names of people who have been members for over two years are on one of the walls written on wooden plaques, and under them on the wall there is more text: "*He that would have the fruit must climb the tree.*"

In the summer when I was training at CrossFit Portland, one of the walls of the box was open to the parking lot. Not only did this bring a very welcome breeze of air to the room where people were dripping in sweat trying to finish the exercise assigned to them that day, but it also made the space extend outside. It made the CrossFitters visible to the

people passing by. Any running associated with the WOD was done outside, so this also extended the performative side of the WOD to the surrounding neighborhood. Knapp (2015, 48) writes that the fluidity and leakage of space is highlighted in how public scrutiny of the exercising female body is more likely to be experienced in the box than in other closed exercise spaces. This did not seem to pose a problem for the women training at CrossFit Portland, because of the box being located in an industrial area with not much pedestrian traffic. However, it does make the exercising bodies experience the space differently from a traditional gym environment, as the physical boundaries of this particular space are pushed beyond the four walls of the box.

4.2 WOD

Glassman's description of the workout of the day (WOD): "*constantly varied functional movements, executed at high intensity, across broad time and modal domains*", is explained by Herz (2014, 31) as: "*hauling yourself and heavy objects, quickly, horizontally or vertically, in any one of hundred ways, over a period of time that ranges from seconds to half an hour.*" In short, this is what CrossFit's WOD entails.

Before one can take part in a WOD, they have to have an assessment of their technical skills or complete a beginner's course. The beginner's Jump Start course that I partook in at CrossFit Portland during my fieldwork was very thorough in going through all of the different movements. Two other participants in a class, both women, and I practiced weightlifting movements, such as Clean and Jerk, with light PVC pipes, our bodies were checked for the range of movement, we got personalized mobility tips, and advice on how to achieve optimal health through diet and exercise. The point of the course, in addition to the introduction of the techniques and practices of CrossFit, was to also make our bodies familiar with the intensity of the workouts. We would increase the intensity bit by bit with each class, until we reached the level of intensity that is usual in a WOD.

Intensity is the foundational element of CrossFit and everyone attending the class is expected to complete the same WOD. Affiliates develop their own programming and each night the WOD for the next day is posted on the box's website. There are

numerous abbreviations (See Table 1) and this contributes to some of the shared language that every CrossFitter comes to know if they practice the sport long enough. Dawson (2015, 6) writes that speaking the same language extends beyond the literal interpretation and has more to do with the shared experience of the CrossFitters.

A typical CrossFit class at the box usually lasts an hour and is comprised of a warm up, mobility and technique practices with additional strength exercises, all of this followed by the WOD that lasts anywhere from a couple of minutes to almost an hour with an average length being from eight to fifteen minutes. The WODs are generally “for time”, for “as many reps as possible” (AMRAP) or “every minute of minute” (EMOM), which is for prescribed weight. The classes are not formal competitions, however, the measuring of the time that it takes for each individual to complete the workout, the reps completed in a set time, or the weight a person is able to lift, all create a competitive environment in a class.

The WOD is performed in a group, but everybody concentrates on their own performance, and the coach observes every individual’s efforts. Knapp (2015, 43) writes that the fact that all athletes complete the same WOD seems to be part of what creates and maintains the CrossFit community. Dawson (2015) points out that interaction is also an essential part of the workout in that, not just the coach, but the participants in the class use their power to perform in cheering each other to push through the workout. Cheering is an integral part of the workout and CrossFitters are actively encouraged and engaged in the interaction context in the box. Interaction facilitates the workout as well as the way the WOD is subjectively experienced (Dawson, 2015, 11-13). There are also partner WODs that emphasize the interactive side by making one work with a partner for the same goal. The general feeling is that these partner workouts are even more competitive because of the added pressure of wanting to perform well in front of one’s partner.

The WOD is done “Rx’d”, which means as prescribed, or it can be scaled. CrossFit describes itself as an inclusive sport partly because of it being open to everyone to try at home through instructions of the movements on the company’s website, but partly also because of its scalability. The movements can be scaled to any specific need, and alternative movements are made available if one is unable to perform a certain

movement. Prescribed weight for men and women are different, lighter weights for women and heavier weights for men. According to Knapp (2015, 49) this is the most overt way the differences between women and men are naturalized in the box. Women may potentially be held back by sexed prescriptions while men might find it hard to measure up. However, Knapp adds that CrossFitters themselves seem to feel that the different prescribed weights create an equal competitive environment for the genders. (Ibid. 50.)

In addition to the WODs developed by CrossFit affiliates, there are also benchmark WODs developed by CrossFit HQ. These include “The Girls” and “The Hero” workouts. Incorporated to each affiliate’s programming of WODs they are used as a means to measure and benchmark members’ progress. (Knapp, 2015, 42.) Knapp points out that what shows the complexity of gender construction within CrossFit is that by employing women’s names and calling them “girls” infantilizes and disempowers women (ibid. 42). Glassman’s (2003) explanation for using female names to identify the benchmark workouts does not do anything to break the stereotype of women as object of heterosexual desire: *“This convenience and logic inspired our granting a special group of workouts women’s names, but anything that leaves you flat on your back and incapacitated only to lure you back for more at a later date certainly deserves naming.”* Still, as Knapp (2015, 42-43) points out, the physical demands of the grueling workouts themselves work to challenge some of the tenets of ideal femininity as passivity and weakness. As an example, what Herz (2014, 21) describes as the most dreaded workout in CrossFit, “Fran” consists of twenty-one thrusters, followed by twenty-one pull-ups, then fifteen of each and then nine of each. The idea of strong femininity is backed up by Glassman’s (2009) explanation for the name Fran: *“If a hurricane that wreaks havoc on a whole town can be Fran, so can a workout”*.

“The Hero” workouts are named after people who have died in service as part of the military, intelligence organizations, police, or firefighters. Heroes can be men or women, but women are largely underrepresented in the category of Hero workouts. Knapp (2015, 43) sees this lack of representation as connected to the media’s symbolic annihilation of women in sport. During a Hero WOD, one should mentally focus on the sacrifice made by the hero. Information about the “hero” is usually included on an affiliate’s website when a hero workout is scheduled. The first Hero workout was

named after CrossFitter and Navy SEAL Lieutenant Michael Murphy, who was killed in military action. “Murph” includes one mile run, 100 pull ups, 200 pushups, 300 air squats and another one mile run. (Knapp, 2015, 43.)

4.3 Competitive Games

Different competitions are organized throughout the year by CrossFitters around the world and they are big part of the CrossFit culture. CrossFitters are encouraged to take part in the competitions, if not by competing themselves then at least by cheering on their local athletes. The biggest competition is the CrossFit Games, organized by the CrossFit company. The CrossFit Games has been growing popularity every year since it was introduced in 2007. Glassman describes the competition as a “true test of fitness”, and the winners of CrossFit Games are crowned as “Fittest Man and Woman on Earth”. The Games are held once a year in Carson, California, and different events that comprise the competition change every year. This means that the details of the challenges that the competitors will face, are not announced until right before each event. Glassman believes that the fittest athletes are able to handle any physical task they encounter, so the competition can entail anything from weightlifting movements to gymnastics to running, or even paddle boarding. According to the CrossFit Games website, the key element to a fair test of fitness is the unknown and unknowable. (About the Games, 2015.)

CrossFit Games are divided into three stages: the Open, the regionals, and the Games. The Open, as its name suggests, is open to anyone (over fourteen years old) in the world to take part in. This is the part that is most visible in the everyday life at the gym, when all members can test their abilities in the workouts that are performed once a week for a five-week period in February-March of every year. The Open is a five-workout competition, where workouts released online are judged at CrossFit affiliates or by submitting a video of the workout to be judged by other athletes. The scores are posted online and the top athletes move on to the regionals that are held in different parts of the world. In 2015 there were eight regionals held, six of them in United States, one in Australia and one in Denmark. The top five men, women, and teams in the regionals

received invitations to the Games, where in Glassman's words "the fittest athletes of the world" compete for prize money, which in 2015 was 275, 000 dollars for both the Fittest Man and the Fittest Woman on Earth. (About the Games, 2015.) The prize money has increased considerable since CrossFit partnered up with an athletic shoe and clothing company Reebok in 2011 for a 10-year sponsorship deal. That same year ESPN network started to cover what was now called the Reebok CrossFit Games, and helped CrossFit grow into a world-wide commercialized sport, lifestyle and training program. (History: Finding the Fittest on Earth, 2015.)

4.4 Online community

On the CrossFit company's webpage the CrossFit community is described as something that spontaneously arises when people do the workouts together. This communal aspect is emphasized as a key component of why CrossFit is so effective. (What is CrossFit? 2015.) I will focus on the community that is formed at the box more in chapter seven. However, there is also a larger community of CrossFitters from all over the world formed through the company's blog that still exists in its original form. Affiliated gyms and individuals are able to follow the workout of the day posts. The blog functions as a platform for meaning construction, and knowledge about health and stories of embodied experiences of the workouts are shared to extend communal ties. In addition to the blog, information is also provided through CrossFit's website and a free online journal called CrossFit Journal. Continually evolving programming, information about the athletes, seminars, and also affiliate support are all made available through digital media. Videos of different movements are posted on the CrossFit company's website so that in principle anybody can perform them regardless of their physical location. The use of digital media is an important aspect of CrossFit, so much so that Heywood (2015) points out that CrossFit would not exist without the Internet.

All affiliates are also required to maintain their own webpages and online forums for members to record, compare and analyze their daily results. (Heywood, 2015.) Affiliates' social media pages (mostly in Facebook and Instagram) form an important addition to the embodied practices. People build the community by posting CrossFit related videos, comments and articles but also by sharing stories about everyday life,

offering support to others and encouraging each other. This creates a feel for community that then carries over to the practices at the gym and vice versa. It is evident that a huge part of the CrossFit culture is facilitated by digital media and it is important to keep this in mind when looking at the embodied aspects of the sport (Heywood, 2015, 24).

In the next three chapters I move on to the analysis of my own research data collected by interviewing female CrossFit participants, and non-participants. The analysis is divided into three themes; strength, health and community. All of these themes stood out from the data as having significant value for the interviewees.

5 Strength

“What is your favorite thing about CrossFit?” (Interviewer)

“I think my favorite thing is just... the number one is the impact it has had on me physically. And the change in my strength and capability and how that leads to how much easier it is for me to function in my life and feel strong and powerful and capable. So probably that feeling of strength. Ha ha ha. I would say the feeling of strength and power.” (Caitlyn, 46)

The idea of strength comes forth in all of the interviews. For female CrossFitters, strength means a combination of physical capability and mental toughness. Strength is seen as an attribute that stands for being able to perform better but eventually it also implies being able to *live* better. In this chapter I will examine the different ways how strength was experienced and talked about in the interviews with female CrossFitters.

5.1 Building strength at the box

Coming to the box for the first time was intimidating for many of the women I interviewed. They had heard stories about how tough the workouts were, and they were afraid that their bodies would appear to be weak and incapable. At the same time they were also intrigued because they had seen their friends or family members get excited about this new training method. Anna, who had practiced CrossFit for a year and a half at the time of the interview, used an example of “throwing down the bars”, when she explained her transformation from a complete beginner who was intimidated by what she saw other CrossFitters do, to partaking in the action and being comfortable at the box:

“I was intimidated! I was in the kid area doing on ramp and all these guys are throwing down the bars. Yeah, so there seriously is an intimidation factor in CrossFit, but once you’re in it, you yourself are throwing down the bars. It’s nice! At first I was afraid of throwing down the bars but like, ok, this is what the elite athletes do, so I’m gonna do it too!” (Anna, 29)

Throwing down the bars at the box means that when you are lifting weight with a barbell and you are either finished with the lift or you fail at finishing it, instead of lowering the weight to the floor in controlled movement, you let it drop down to the floor. When many people drop the barbells simultaneously in a WOD, the weights hitting the floor create a powerful sound. When a person is lifting weight at the verge of the maximum amount she is capable of lifting, throwing down the bar is also explained by the coaches as being a safer way to lower the weight. In the beginning a person has to learn the correct technique of lifting weight, and it is recommended to start with lighter weight, hence, throwing down the bars is usually equated with strength and skill of more experienced CrossFitters. For Anna, throwing down the bars signified a transition from being an outsider and a beginner to CrossFit to the feeling of belonging and being strong.

Janessa, a CrossFit coach, athlete and the owner of a CrossFit box, describes how women gain confidence when they are able to complete the physical challenges presented to them at the box:

“There are a lot of ladies who come in here with zero confidence that gain confidence, because they can now hold on to a pull up bar and bring their knees up, or now do things they never thought possible. So you have to have an attitude to make those changes and not quit. So you have to have that... We have tons of ladies who come here that are frightened. They never touched a barbell before, never put chalk on their hands, they never had blisters on their hand or anything like that. And then they just are so empowered by just the small milestones... that they can step up on a 12inch box, so they can jump off of that.” (Janessa, 30)

Janessa, like Anna, explains how the women get more comfortable with the CrossFit practices bit by bit with continued practice. Small milestones of being able to perform a movement become important experiences for the women, and the acquired attitude and skill make them feel empowered.

The simple individual movements performed at the box can seem pretty easy to an outside observer, but when combined together in the WOD, they can be brutal. Everybody at the box works at their own level of capabilities, but what is shared by all

is the element of trying to work as hard as possible. This means always increasing your weight when possible and continuously making progress. This translates into constant improvement and strength gain. It also creates a competitive environment where everybody is pushing their own limits. The practice is challenging and along with physical strength it demands a certain type of mental attitude that helps you to push through the uncomfortable feeling of pain and nausea. It is expected that everyone taking part in the WOD is committed to finishing the workout. Whether you are scaling the workout down with lower weights or doing a different version of the movement the most important thing is that you are giving it your all and finishing. Giving up is not an option; partly because of peer pressure and partly because of the acquired attitude of mental toughness that manifests itself in the self-surveillance:

“I knew I could get through that, I didn’t know how long it was going to take for me to do it. But I knew I could. And I knew that I wasn’t going to stop until I got it done and I like to be able to challenge myself like that. And this is very challenging for me. You don’t see people giving up... you don’t see people sitting on the sideline or not doing the workouts. Seems like people are pretty committed and they are challenged and they wanna complete the challenge.” (Lauren, 49)

Dawson (2015) writes that in CrossFit self-surveillance combined with the surveillance from others suppresses any rebellious drives. Mental toughness is built through “not quitting” and pushing yourself to finish the workout. What seems to be at work here are Foucault’s (1977; 1978) “disciplinary techniques of the body”, that in modern industrial cultures have taken the form of self-discipline. According to Foucault (1978) disciplinary power is a specific technique of power that regards individuals not just as objects, but also as instrument of its exercise. For the female CrossFitters self-discipline is something that they put to use in making their bodies “docile” and strong.

Mental and physical strength are seen as complementary and equally important in CrossFit, and both are constructed at the box through the performed workouts. As the female CrossFitters get better at performing the workouts, their newly acquired strength makes them feel more confident and empowered as they learn to challenge themselves in an environment that at first seemed intimidating and foreign to them.

5.2 Influence on everyday life

The main thing emphasized in female CrossFitters' own accounts is how mental and physical strength gives them the feeling of empowerment, not just in the box but also in their everyday lives outside the box. Getting stronger through performing the WOD makes the women feel like they do not have to rely on other people in everyday life situations, because of the increased functionality and capability of their bodies. Cathy, who is a working mother and has a busy schedule with juggling her career and family life, explained how she feels CrossFit has helped her in different tasks of everyday life:

“Like I feel like it helps me all day long at work. it helps me, I feel better all day, I mean, when I go home, oh my gosh, I can lift crazy stuff at home, I can redecorate my house and I don't need anybody to help me with it, because I can just like carry stuff and move it around. I like that, I totally love that. It gives me... less frustration. I guess it decreases my frustration about needing help for certain things. I think we all... You wanna feel like you can take care of yourself, and like take care of your family members if needed. You can carry the two bags of groceries up the hill, you know whatever it is. Umm. Yeah so everyday life, it's definitely a positive.” (Cathy, 45)

The idea of the functionality of the body comes up frequently at the box, but it only becomes tangible when women talk about their lived experiences. Transported to real life the functional body is able to carry grocery bags home, climb up six flights of stairs, lift luggage to the overhead compartment on a plane or run to catch a train before it leaves the platform. Functional bodies are more independent as they are capable of doing ordinary things that require strength in everyday life.

Mental strength is emphasized as much as its physical counterpart. Anna talks about the mentality of “attacking” things in everyday life:

“But I think it's the mentality that I carry out to everyday life. The strong will and attacking the things in real world. Not allowing people to say you can't do it, to me. Because in CrossFit you don't get that. You don't have coaches saying that you can't do that. They might say go down in weight, don't hurt yourself, but never no you can't. So

when I go out to a real world, I don't take no for an answer. And I attack everything like I do with crossfit. Even studying, and I think of it like a WOD too, you know just break it up. And that's the only way that I cannot stress myself out. Life, school... just proportion everything out like a WOD. Like a looong WOD." (Anna, 29)

Mental strength at the box is seen as the ability to push through bodily discomfort to complete the WOD. How that translates to everyday life is by finding a solution in a situation where one feels like they cannot do something. "Not taking no for an answer" is seen as a positive mentality which helps one achieve things in life. When Anna talks about proportioning everything out like a WOD she is talking about focusing on the task at hand, whether it be in school or work, and using the strong will and determination she has acquired in CrossFit practice to resolve problems in "real world". Very fitting to describe the female CrossFitters' experiences of strength is Bordo's (1993, 28) example of a woman who goes on a rigorous weight-training program in order to achieve the currently stylish look, but then discovers that her practice also gives her the self-confidence that enables her to assert herself more forcefully at work.

Strength experienced outside the box becomes a symbol for determination and independence:

"What does that (feeling of strength) mean?" (Interviewer)

"I think it means being capable of lifting my six year old up the stairs, I mean, I can do that! That's really amazing. Interestingly... I just feel much stronger physically, and capable, no matter what the activity is that's coming before me. So I think the physical strength and endurance that has come out of this. And how it makes me feel more like a capable parent, feel like a better role model to my patients at work, and yeah. It's sad my husband said to me... now that you are CrossFitting you don't need me for anything, you don't even need me to help you pick up anything! I actually enjoy the challenges of trying to lift something heavy and feel like I know how to do it, and that... Wow... Look at these capabilities, and you know that first time I was in here... Coming in here... This was not a fitness thing that I had known before. There is strength and capabilities that have come out of this, at the age of forty-six, that this forty-six year old body has never been able to do. So it's... yeah. Completely. Who is this person? Wow! I had no idea I

could... I was able bodied. So that's the physical element that is so empowering and powerful for just your identity.” (Caitlyn, 46)

The interviewees express that performing well at the box and how that translates to everyday life is an empowering experience for them because it increases their confidence and makes them feel accomplished and good about themselves. For Caitlyn this means that she feels like she can be a better role model at her workplace and a better parent at home. She also points out a change in her relationship with her husband as she becomes more capable in doing things that require strength at home. Her husband's comment about her “not needing him for anything” is expressed jokingly, but shows a slight shift in power relations between genders, as Caitlyn begins to perform femininity in the way that disrupts the idea of women as “weaker sex” (Bolin, 2003). This shows how through the embodiment of strength and increase in their independence the female CrossFitters start to experience their gender identities in different ways. As Krane et al. (2004) have pointed out, rather than simply being passive victims of hegemonic femininity, women can actively choose how the paradoxes of dueling identities are lived through different gender and femininity performances (ibid. 327-328.).

5.3 Gender identities in transition

“CrossFit has changed me. I used to be submissive in a sense. I didn't have self-confidence, not only in myself but the things that I do. So my perception has changed, my outlook in life, how I carry myself in everyday life, in school. It has helped me to become a strong person.” (Anna, 29)

Since Anna started to practice CrossFit, she has experienced a change in herself. She describes the change as a change in bodily strength, a different attitude towards life, and, as mentioned in the above excerpt from the interview, the way she carries herself in everyday life. Other interviewees also bring up the idea of change and the increase of overall mental and bodily strength is experienced as part of a positive transformation from the old weak self towards a new independent, healthy, more confident and tough

self. The old self is seen as more reliant on other people; someone who needs help with everyday tasks. On the other hand, the new self that is constructed at the box is seen as able to face challenges that “life throws at you”. Needing help with daily tasks is considered as something that causes frustration. “Being stuck” or in Anna’s words, being “the damsel in distress” is a situation she does not want to see herself in:

“It’s not like only men can lift weights, women can lift weights too! And I like that. After starting it, I wanna be strong for myself, I don’t want to be... I’m doing this for myself. Not for what people think or what people think, like.... I don’t wanna be that person who gets stuck... Oh, I can’t lift something. I don’t wanna be the damsel in distress! I don’t wanna be rescued by a guy when I can’t lift something, ha ha ha.” (Anna, 29)

Being able to combat the physical challenges of the WOD and how that translates into the life outside the box as increased strength, is seen as not having to be rescued in the situation that requires bodily strength. As Butler (1990, 34) writes, gender identity is always "doing", it is performative. The woman itself is a term in process, a becoming, and a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification (ibid. 45). The CrossFitters are then constructing a feminine identity through taking part in an activity of lifting weights, which, as Dworkin (2003) points out, has been mainly a masculine domain of action. According to Knapp (2014), CrossFit space helps to break down gender differences as it allows females and males to engage in the same forms of physical activity within the same space often in competition with one another. Entering into the weight room and taking up weights in volumes then offers opportunity to challenge traditional notions of masculinity and femininity. (Ibid. 2.)

Dawson (2015) uses a concept of “reinventive institution” when she describes the transformative power of CrossFit in the lived experiences of CrossFitters. She writes that it offers insight into the phenomenon's voluntary self-improvement and identity reconstruction (ibid. 2). Becoming a better version of oneself is encompassed in the idea of CrossFit identity. CrossFit is not just what you do, but it is who you are (ibid. 10.).

“I like it. Even at school people call me the CrossFit girl. At first I was a little annoyed, but then I was like yeah, I like that. I like that identification.” (Anna, 29)

“What do you think other people think, or what’s their perception of that CrossFit girl?” (Interviewer)

“I think someone who is strong. I mean like... strong, muscular.... I think their perception is strength, confidence. Be more secure in yourself, because you feel good about yourself that’s another thing too, if you feel good about yourself. I feel better about myself, feel accomplished too.” (Anna, 29)

Anna’s identification as a CrossFit girl makes her feel accomplished and good about herself. She feels that she has gone through a transformation with the help of her CrossFit practice, from what used to be a submissive self, to a strong, confident self that is more secure in herself.

Having other women as role models inside CrossFit community helps the interviewees in the reconstruction of gender identities:

“I have so many women that I admire here... So many, not just one. I mean, my friend, when she was here, it was hard not to marvel at her, not just because of her amazing strength, like the amounts of weight that that woman can move around with perfect form is phenomenal. But also just her fortitude to every workout, there’s no stopping her. but I mean, there’s many women here I think just seeing them moving lots of very big weights, looking like superwomen, it’s just so fun to watch, it’s awesome. It’s like how can that not be inspiring, it’s like oh my gosh look at her go!” (Caitlyn, 46)

Role models inspire and offer an ideal one can identify herself with. They are athletes, coaches, or just other women practicing at the box. They are admired for their strength and you hear them being referred to as “superwomen”, or even more often as being a “badass”. Being a superwoman or a badass requires a certain level of skill and strength that makes a person stand out from other people at the box. Role models have usually spent a long time acquiring attributes that are regarded valuable in the context of CrossFit and they are looked up to for their hard work and tenacity. The process of identity reconstruction involves an element of identification:

“Camille... (LeBlanc-Bazinet, the female winner of 2014 CrossFit Games) she’s the number one and I’ve been following her for at least the last two years. But I mean she’s almost in the same boat as I am, she’s going to school, and training. I mean, I’m not training for any major competition, but I use her as a role model, like being able to go through school and get all the training done. She’s amazing so... I was like... I wanna be the next Camille!” (Anna, 29)

Wanting to be the person you admire is metaphorical and stands for the goal that one is working towards. Striving for the embodiment of the attributes that the female role model is perceived to represent is part of the process of reconstruction of feminine CrossFit identity. This process is ongoing and transitory by nature. Like Butler (1990) and also Donnelly and Young (1988, 237) have pointed out, identities should not be thought of as static entities, because of constant revision and change due to variety of processes in the context they are constructed. More important for female CrossFitters than the unachievable idea of becoming the person they admire, is working towards becoming better, stronger versions of themselves. Strength and the practices related to attaining it are replete with norms, values and meanings, which once internalized help in the project of creating feminine selves that are more confident, independent and capable.

5.4 Muscular feminine bodies

“I think a lot of people are intimidated by anybody who does CrossFit, still. But I’m not sure... Like, my point of view is that they better be accepting, because the girls are here, and girls are getting stronger! Ha ha. And you know, they are gonna miss out, if they are not going to be open to that.” (Cathy, 45)

Strength is seen by female CrossFitters as imbued with positive value. Not just professional athletes but also women who have dedicated themselves to CrossFit for only a few months are noticing their bodies changing towards a more muscular, bigger body type. However, they seem to be unsure of how it is perceived outside of the CrossFit community, and feel like people outside the box might be intimidated by their strong physique. A muscular body is a visible marker of strength. In the interviews

women contrasted the visibly muscular bodies with the *thin, toned, but not too muscular* feminine body ideal that has been emphasized in Western cultures¹⁹ (the U.S. and Western Europe).

Markula (1995) writes that the concept of a muscular woman was redefined when Jane Fonda published Jane Fonda's Workout Book in 1981 and aerobic was born as a practice to attain the body that was fit, trim and muscular. Toned muscles became an important part of the ideal feminine body and special shaping exercises became an integral part of the aerobics class. (Ibid. 432.) However, she writes that even though muscular body is a "good female body", extreme muscularity is discouraged. Muscles are "toned", not "built" (ibid. 435-436). Aerobicizers in Markula's study want firm arm muscles without bulking up, and the muscle size becomes an intricate matter. (Ibid. 441.) Dawson (2015, 10) brings forth the contradictory nature of body ideals within and beyond CrossFit community; CrossFit seems to represent a means to achieve the media-cultivated body ideal in which "strong is the new sexy/skinny", but then seeks to push the boundaries further by encouraging visible muscularity. In CrossFit, opposed to Markula's (1995) aerobicizers, it is exactly building muscles that is encouraged.

Women reflect on their change to a more muscular body type, and how it is perceived by other people, especially people close to them like friends, families and co-workers:

"They (the family and friends) have seen the media, they see the young girls and I'm not that way anymore. At first it got to me a lot. When they are like, you used to be so thin... And I was like, I don't want that! (...) I think now they are gradually accepting it, I totally have accepted it, but I can't wear skinny jeans anymore! Ha ha ha. I want people to see that I'm so strong and buff. And I think that that's more of a compliment than someone saying, oh you're so skinny. You know? I think that the best compliment is that you look strong, you are a strong person, you look like a very confident person." (Anna, 29)

Anna talks about how her family and friends have been affected by the media images of small females and how in the beginning they were apprehensive of her CrossFit practice and what it was doing to her body. She used to be very petite but now she is gaining

¹⁹ See Bordo 1993, Forbes et al. 2012, Mansfield et al. 1993, Krane et al. 2004 and Scott 2011.

more muscle, so much so that she does not fit into some of her old clothes anymore. Nevertheless, she expressed how she has embraced these changes in her body and accepted it as being part of her new feminine identity as a CrossFitter. Now she wants people to notice how strong and buff her body has become because she associates it with being a strong, confident person.

Markula (1995) writes that patriarchal domination over women is based on the assumption that men are naturally and biologically stronger and bigger than women. To retain this power arrangement it is necessary to define female body differently from the male body. The ideal female muscles are sleek and firm and the powerful male's muscles are visible and big. A strong, overweight woman would then theoretically offer the most direct resistance to the patriarchal notions of femininity in our society, as her body would directly oppose the toned and thin ideal. (Ibid. 441-442.)

Knapp (2015, 48-52) points out that through being encouraged to develop their musculature, the female CrossFitters in her study noticed an attention shift from focusing on the perceived need to lose weight to focusing on how strong one was becoming. This shift was also evident in my own interview material:

“I think especially if someone is overweight, getting them out of that mindset of dropping weight and more to getting healthier and getting stronger, because losing weight is such a negative way to view, I need to be lighter and lighter. There's something that they can feel proud of if they hit that weight, but if you gain some strength that can happen more quickly and you can be proud of that. It's a more positive way of looking at change.” (Hayley, 30)

Trying to gain strength is considered to be better than striving for weight loss. Gaining strength is seen as a positive form of change contrasted to the negative mindset of losing weight and wanting to be lighter. Yet being overweight is not encouraged if it gets in the way of being able to perform well at the box. Women's “performance discourse” however favors bigger, strong bodies over thin, weak ones. Female CrossFitters are clear in stating that the thin body ideal for women does not affect them the same way that it used to:

“I think I’m probably the heaviest I’ve been in about ten or fifteen years... I’m hungry. So when I work out I have to eat. I have not lost any weight. But that’s not really a big deal to me. I’m more accepting of that. I’m like okay well, I might have a little belly roll that I don’t really like, but hey if I’m going to CrossFit and I’m getting stronger, I’m okay with it, I can deal with this, it’s actually made me more accepting of that. Little weight gain, but I’m stronger.” (Cathy, 45)

Perceived weight gain is brushed off as unimportant, because in the context of CrossFit, strength gain is regarded more valuable than weight loss. Hanold (2010), in her study of ultra-runners, writes that participants in the sport actively make sense of discourses and construct their sporting “selves” and bodies in unique ways within the critical awareness of the ideal female body discourse. For Hanold’s runners sporting experiences create a critical awareness of the normative thin and muscular running body represented in the media because of the practices that shape the female bodies according to what they can do rather than what their bodies look like. (ibid. 160-177.) The shape of the normative running body is not seen as useful to the process of being a “successful” ultrarunner. Hence, the runners no longer desire an extremely thin body. (Ibid. 173-174.) What emerges is a broader view of what counts as a legitimate running body. For the female ultrarunners from Hanold’s study, the experiences of success and physical competency make them feel good about their bodies that do well in respect to others, especially men. (Ibid. 160-177.)

The “success” discourse of sport seems to take priority among sport participants over the normative body ideal discourse. This comes forth also among the women rugby players of Chase's (2006) study, who actively reconstruct their bodies to be bigger, stronger, and more muscular. They feel strong, confident and powerful and enjoy the fact that they are strong and do nothing to conceal their strength. (Ibid. 240.) Chase writes that many of the women recognize that they are challenging images of the ideal female body and using their bodies in ways that disturb the boundaries of what is appropriate for women. They are also acutely aware of how their size and strength differs from other women around them. (Ibid. 241-242.) Within rugby, physical characteristics such as strength, power, muscularity and size are valued and rewarded, however, all body types are seen as functional (ibid. 242-243).

As Knapp (2014; 2015) writes, the female CrossFitters are encouraged to move beyond the socially acceptable goals of “firming” and “toning”, and to push their bodies to become strong, powerful and fit. This is also evident in my own research. Functionality of the body becomes the focus of the women through continuous practice of the sport. It is more important to them to do well in their chosen sport than to be a certain size. The lived experience of embodied strength seems to overrule the concerns about the body size maintenance, and perceived expectations from the outside are negotiated in the female CrossFitter’s stories. As Chase (2006, 235) writes, it is through power and the body that the female participants in a sport challenge discourses of normative femininity and the ideal feminine body, and in this process they create new discourses and bodies.

5.5 Photo elicitation and the CrossFit beauty ideals

According to Knapp (2014), hegemonic ideologies are produced in mass media. Mediated representations are never neutral and they are imbued with power dynamics. Gender differentiations are often conveyed through photographic images of sport. Female athletes are more likely to be photographed in passive or less active poses or they are under-represented or sexualized. However, in her study of the images in CrossFit Journal Knapp brings forth the idea that CrossFit can offer women a "site" where ideal femininity can be challenged. This was evident in the increased number of women represented in the CrossFit Journal and females engaging in activity like gymnastics and lifting weight. (Knapp, 2014.)

I used a “photo elicitation” method in the end of each interview to see what ideas the cover images in different sport magazines would invoke in the interviewees. The magazine cover in the first picture is from Natural Health magazine dedicated to yoga (*Figure 1*), the second picture is a cover of fitness/bodybuilding magazine Muscle & Fitness (*Figure 2*) and the third picture is a cover of CrossFit magazine called Sweat Rx (*Figure 3*).



Figure 1: Jenna Dewan-Tatum on the cover of *Natural Health* magazine, July/August 2014. Photograph by Jeff Lipsky. Weider Publications, LLC.

All of the interviewees saw the first two images (*Figures 1 and 2*) as representative of feminine body ideal they had seen on media (magazines and television) in United States. This was described as something that is unhealthy and not good for you:

“Wow... Well I mean the way women are portrayed... It’s (feminine beauty ideal in U.S.) sadly gonna be those two (Figure 1 and Figure 2), yeah. Which doesn’t do any of our young women, or any of us women any favors.” (Lynn, 46)



Figure 2: Amanda Latona on the cover of Muscle & Fitness Hers magazine, July/August 2014. Photograph by Per Bernal. Weider Publications, LLC.

“In the past it was always super skinny (shows Figure 1). And now it’s still super skinny, but with muscle (shows Figure 2). Neither which are that healthy.” (Hayley, 30)

To female CrossFitters, a thin body connotes lack of strength. The interviewees also equate a thin body with unhealthy practices, like starving yourself, not listening to your body, losing weight and not being capable or able bodied. The pose on the cover of Natural Health magazine (Figure 1) was seen as submissive, and the woman on the cover was talked about as “not eating enough”, “not exercising” and “not having enough muscle tone”. The woman on the cover of Muscle and Fitness magazine (Figure 2) was on the other hand seen as having some muscle tone, but also being “too thin”.



Figure 3: Lindsey Valenzuela on the cover of *Sweat Rx*, April/May 2014. Photograph by Hannah Hayworth. Sweat Equity Lifestyle Media Group.

She was thought of as representative of a woman who conforms to heteronormative rules of attractiveness that demand for women to enhance their sexuality in the eyes of men with flowy hair, make-up, and artificial nails, eye lashes and chest.

The image in the cover of the CrossFit magazine *Sweat Rx* (Figure 3), is perceived by the interviewees to portray a woman who embodies strength. Conversations about the magazine covers also show that the bodies of female CrossFitters are not seen as contiguous with the thin or the thin and muscular ideals that the interviewees see as the feminine body ideals for women in the United States. A different body ideal is constructed especially for female CrossFitters:

“This is (Figure 3) not the mainstream beauty ideal. No. This girls legs are way bigger than the traditional beauty ideal. Much bigger legs, smaller breasts, CrossFit girls... You don’t see the big implanted chest very much... At all. They seem to have... Well this is like the CrossFit ideal. And that’s what we see at our gym. The really strong girls that are competing and that are doing all this stuff, this is how they look. It’s like to me this (Figure 1) is not what I wanna be... I mean, I like the natural thing, but I think more... Since I’ve been doing CrossFit, I wanna look stronger than that. I think it (CrossFit) definitely has made me more accepting of um... Just being strong and able rather than looking a certain way or... Yeah, I think it has actually provided a new ideal! For something like this (Figure 3), as opposed to this (Figure 2), which is what we’ve seen all the time. We haven’t seen this (Figure 3) really before very much. You know, you’ve seen the bodybuilders, but they’ve got the huge implants and the things sticking out... These girls are more natural looking, and then just in general what you see when you go to CrossFit. It’s you know, more acceptance. You definitely can see what you can do, you change your own ideas on what is important, which is actually being able to get through your workout rather than to hit a certain number on the scale. Or fit into certain pants, I mean what is more important. You do have to decide. I think CrossFit forces you to decide, am I gonna eat when I’m hungry, and eat what’s good for me, or am I gonna try to starve out and get into those pants.” (Cathy, 45)

Cathy describes how her ideas of beauty have changed since she started practicing CrossFit. She has seen the really strong women at the box, identified with them and acquired a mentality of wanting to get strong herself. This process of identification that is part of the construction of feminine CrossFit identity has moved her focus from watching her weight and restricting her eating to being able to perform better at the box and in everyday life. The CrossFit body ideal for her means being visibly strong and bigger than the traditional beauty ideal. A CrossFit girl has bigger legs and smaller breasts, and is contrasted to bodybuilders, who are seen as antithesis of the naturalness of CrossFitters. Bodybuilders and bikini fitness competitors, as seen in Muscle and Fitness magazine, are thought of as overly sexualized with their chest implants, make-up, and hair extensions.

Bodybuilders are also seen as being unhealthy because of their perceived willingness to resort to drug use in the effort to gain more muscle mass:

“I don’t really like the whole bodybuilders thing... That is not an appealing look to me. Umm. But... So yes, I think there is a fine line in it being too much.”(Lauren, 49)

“Would you say that somewhere it stops being healthy? If you think that strong is healthy...” (Interviewer)

“I think if people use drugs in order to gain muscle mass... Then I don’t think that’s healthy. If you do it from healthy lifestyle and working out that to me doesn’t seem unhealthy.” (Lauren, 49)

Naturalness, whether it comes to lifestyle, diets or looks, is valued highly by the female CrossFitters. As Kinnunen (2001) writes, “natural” beauty is also culturally constructed category, and there is a fine line with techniques that are considered natural or unnatural. She points out that even colored hair, silicon breasts, fake tan and cosmetically enhanced lips and nose are considered natural beauty when they are not blatantly visible. (Ibid. 204.) For the interviewees, naturalness is equated with a healthy lifestyle, and natural beauty is defined as being less about the looks and more about strength and being active:

“I think to me this woman looks like she works very hard, and that fitness is something that she has embraced (Figure 3), and you know it looks like she’s doing it because she wants to be strong and competitive. This woman looks like she definitely is fit and works out (Figure 2), but maybe it’s more for looks.”(Lauren, 49)

The active pose of the female CrossFitter (Figure 3) and the lack of make-up and other visible characteristics that are traditionally associated with women in media images creates a juxtaposition to the other two images (Figures 1 and 2). It seems to be easier for the interviewees to relate to the woman in the cover of Swear Rx (Figure 3):

“So I like her (Figure 3), oh my god look at her, wow, she’s strong! And it’s so much more like in men’s athletic magazines, where they are portrayed all like urgh, I’m doing this thing! It’s not like... It’s like men don’t have pictures of men in bikinis for each other on their covers. Yeah, so I think it’s great. Interestingly, I would think that in the past if you would’ve asked me that question before CrossFit, I would’ve felt like you know, I would’ve said that this (Figure 3) is more impressive, but I think I have more, I feel more of a connection with that woman now being a CrossFitter just with the whole

strength mindedness. Which is cool. I feel more emotion about it than I think I would've if I hadn't been doing this." (Caitlyn, 46)

Caitlyn compares the images to men's athletic magazines, and feels as the image of the active female in the CrossFit magazine is a positive change from the images of women in bikinis. She also feels that by taking part in the practices of CrossFit she has acquired knowledge about the mental strength needed in the workout that makes it possible for her to understand what the woman in the image is going through.

The image of the CrossFit woman is also described as being more realistic:

"The Sweat magazine (Figure 3) I think portrays a stronger woman, and it's not... She's still all decked out with flowy hair, but she... There's a different type of beauty, and that's strength. And it's more realistic than being posed. Sometimes the girls that are stacked out in make-up and high heels I think sometimes they are putting up a front. I sometimes think that they are fake. They are dressing up the way society expects them to be, they are sometimes not confident about themselves, and I think it's the shoes and the clothes and the make-up that is covering the true nature. And I think that if they let that go, who cares about sweaty pulled back hair and wearing shorts and a tank top." (Anna, 29)

Being "posed" and appearing "fake" are seen as demonstrating a lack of confidence, and conforming to society's rules. Being strong and being a badass, having visible muscle definition that shows that you have trained hard and not skipped your meals, and achieving this naturally without the use of steroids is what is seen as an ideal for female CrossFitters:

"This (Figure 3) girl is gonna kick your ass! I mean this (Figure 1), she doesn't have any muscle definition, she's not... Yeah, this is a girl that doesn't work out (Figure 1). I mean even if you do yoga, you have muscle definition. This girl just doesn't eat. And you know what, that's not healthy. This is just like holy crap, check out these (Figure 3). I didn't know there was a crossfit magazine! This freaks out my best friend, which I get mad at her for, she's just like there's so much muscle! And I'm like there's nothing wrong with muscle, muscle is not... As long as they are not doing steroids. Oh that's that badass girl from Iceland! Yeah. She's amazing!" (Caitlyn, 46)

Photo elicitation used in this subchapter shows how visual aspects of femininity are talked about by the interviewees. What is shown is that mental and physical strength are not just ideas that manifest themselves in performance, but also mold the body and can be observed as embodied strength. Old beauty ideals are contested by female CrossFitters, and new ones emerge. These CrossFit beauty ideals are seen as functional bodies that embody visible strength and are in conjunction with the demands of the sport. Healthy, natural, able, active bodies that display visible muscles are ideals that are constructed as part of the feminine CrossFit identities.

6 Health

CVFM @ HI + Communal Environment = Health

This equation can be found on CrossFit company's website with an explanation: "*A regimen of constantly varied (CV), functional movements (FM) performed at high intensity (@HI) in a communal environment leads to health and fitness.*" (What is CrossFit?)

CrossFit presents itself as a program designed to improve health. Greg Glassman (2002c), the founder and developer of CrossFit, talks about health as a continuum from sickness to wellness to fitness, with fitness being described as "super-wellness". Fitness is explained by Glassman (2002c) as something that "*protects against the ravages of time and disease*", and he writes that a fitness regimen that does not support health is not CrossFit. It is evident that the priority and the end goal of CrossFit's program is health, with fitness as its highest measure.

In the course of this study, all of the interviewees discussed the importance of health and stated that one of the main reasons why they started to practice CrossFit was to improve their health. It was also shown in the previous chapter that the beauty ideal for female CrossFitters was equated to being healthy. In this chapter I will examine how health and practices of health were talked about in the interviews and what meanings were given to the ideas of health and the healthy feminine body constructed in and through CrossFit practice.

6.1 "Healthist" ideas for getting in shape

The interviewees had very similar ideas about the definition of health. They contrasted it with being unhealthy, which equates to being ill or having problems with your health. However, health cannot be simplified as a body without an illness, instead it extends to an idea of a complete physical and mental wellbeing and strength. Crawford (1985; 2000; 2006) writes that the idea of health, increasingly defined as a set of abilities rather

than an absence of illness, has become something that the subject can acquire and for which they are personally responsible. “Healthism” is a term used by Crawford to describe the emergence of the new health consciousness in the 1970s that made health a “super-value”. (Ibid.)

Many of the female CrossFitters perpetuate Crawford’s view of health as a super-value, when they bring forth how health has become a priority in their life:

“I think CrossFit made me view health... Make health more of a priority in my life which I’m grateful for too. Just in a way that it’s changed my views on food and diet and wanting to make being healthy my top priority. Before I was trying to be healthy but I didn’t know what I was doing. And this just helped turn it into better eating habits, and sleeping habits.” (Hayley, 30)

CrossFit has provided a way for these women to become more aware of their health and the practices involved with it. It is clear, from the elaborate and intricate ways that “health talk” (Crawford, 2006, 402) was used in the interviews, that health promotion and discourses of medical knowledge had affected the women’s ideas of themselves and others even before CrossFit.²⁰ However, the female CrossFitters felt that CrossFit gave them a clearer idea of how to achieve health through certain practices. The guidelines for eating, sleeping and exercise habits are available on the CrossFit’s website and also introduced at the box as coaches instruct members to make the right choices for better health and fitness. Glassman’s description of “world-class fitness in 100 words” is something that most CrossFitters are familiar with:

“Eat meat and vegetables, nuts and seeds, some fruit, little starch and no sugar. Keep intake to levels that will support exercise but not body fat. Practice and train major lifts: Deadlift, clean, squat, presses, C&J, and snatch. Similarly, master the basics of gymnastics: pull-ups, dips, rope climb, push-ups, sit-ups, presses to handstand, pirouettes, flips, splits, and holds. Bike, run, swim, row, etc., hard and fast. Five or six days per week mix these elements in as many combinations and patterns as creativity

²⁰ Foucault (1977) writes that government agencies and health experts are creating health discourse that exerts social control to create a healthy society. This changes to individual’s self-control by internalization of this discourse, here referred as “health talk”.

will allow. Routine is the enemy. Keep workouts short and intense. Regularly learn and play new sports.” (Glassman, 2002c.)

These are the simple, yet demanding, instructions on how to move and eat, without forgetting the importance of rest and an element of play in the practices. These recommendations hold promises of longevity and health in that they are given for the attainment of fitness which then, according to Glassman, protects the body against time and disease.

Crawford (1985) writes that health is not a given, but it is something that must be achieved. Health is a distinct goal and object of intentional action. Since health does not flow from normal, everyday activities, it requires a commitment of time and energy. Continuous striving for self-improvement has become a moral duty, and health as discipline is equivalent to hard work. According to Crawford, health is a metaphor for self-control and being “in shape” exemplifies mastery of mind over body. (Ibid. 67-72.) The female CrossFitters also equate being healthy with being in shape, which then means having strong, capable and active bodies (as was concluded in the previous chapter). Kinnunen’s (2001) bodybuilders talk about super-health/fitness, which brings with it the advantages of: strength, overall better physical and mental wellbeing, more energy, a better sex life, controlled weight, slowing down ageing, bettering of physical and mental performance, general self-control and a peace of mind (ibid. 189-190). This list is similar to what are seen as the benefits of the deployment of CrossFit practices by the female CrossFitters.

6.2 Threat of illness and age

There seems to be an agreement with the women, that healthy, “in shape” –bodies are something that one has to work for in order to prevent illness. This is especially the case if one leads a sedentary lifestyle, as pointed out by Caitlyn:

“Why do you think being in shape is important?” (Interviewer)

“I think that it is important for just mobility and functioning, and injury prevention, like back injuries. You know, disc and muscle injuries are prevalent in modern society, just sitting on the desk all day, sitting at the computer having their body evolving into like a c –shape. They need to be moving more. So I think it is injury prevention, heart attack and stroke prevention... I mean there are studies proving all of this, increases longevity, decreases... risks for depression and anxiety, some studies will show it does.” (Caitlyn, 46)

The everyday lifestyle of an office worker is seen as bad for your health because it makes the body immobile. This can lead to not only physical ailments like strokes, heart attacks, or back and muscle injuries, but also mental illnesses like depression and anxiety. Sickness and injury are caused by sedentary lifestyles and can be combatted by increased mobility that comes with being in shape and moving more.

Ageing is also seen as something that decreases the capability of the body:

“I wanna feel healthy. I wanna feel like I’m able to do... You know almost anything physically. And I think that by not exercising for a long time... And my age... That I really started to feel like that if I didn’t get back into something and building up my strength, I was afraid that I would get into my fifties and then be in big trouble, not being able to do anything. And that scares me. I wanted to be able to do something to address that, and get myself back in shape. I really feel like I’m at a tipping point and if I don’t do something, my health will decline. And I’m getting to an age that I think it’s really important to do something, so that I give myself a chance to be healthy and strong.” (Lauren, 49)

Staying healthy seems to also be a race against time. Lauren mentions that what scares her is if she will not being able to do anything as her body gets older and her health declines. As Markula (1995, 442) writes, another component to women’s bodywork load is that our bodies must always stay young. Also Kinnunen (2001, 194) points out that health is connected to the ideas of youth, and that practices of health are not just taken up to postpone the inevitable death, but also to alleviate the signs of age.

According to Granskog (2003), in American society the importance of youthfulness of women is stressed above all. When men become more distinguished and respected as they age, women’s ageing is seen in a negative light in that they just get old and grey.

Hence, women should strive to maintain the image of youthfulness for as long as possible. (Ibid. 33.) People are expected to not only look young but also feel young until the very end of their lives (Kinnunen, 2001, 194).

As women's bodies get older, they are seen as losing some of their vitality and capabilities. CrossFit is presented as an antidote, and its practices help the women feel like they increase the power of their bodies to do things and to be active in the world.

"I wanna build muscle and strength to support my bones and age better. And I'm just glad that I found out about it so I can put myself in the position to be healthier as I get older." (Hayley, 30)

Health acquired through CrossFit practices does not stop the passing of time but it makes the body stronger and more capable, hence it makes the body age better. By saying that she can put herself in the position to be healthier, Hayley is taking matters in her own hands to fight ageing. This shows how individual women are thought of as being responsible for the work that has to be done to prevent the decline of bodily competence, which happens with illness and age.

6.3 Health as the good life

Prioritizing your health is seen by female CrossFitters as something that you have to do in order to also succeed in other aspects of your life. It is a prerequisite for being able to fulfill a role of a good mother, partner or worker. Crawford (2000, 226) writes that the work ethic has found a metaphorical expression in the work of making the body healthy, and the managers of production benefit from the mandate of disciplined activity that is taken up in the name of health and fitness. In the interviews the female CrossFitters talked about how without health their bodies would be physically incapable and not using their full potentiality. Their bodies exist in the world for the purpose of useful activity. But as Crawford (2006, 402-404) points out, health is not just conceived as important for work, but it is also the condition of possibility for the "good life". Cultural contradictions of modern capitalism, production and consumption require both the work

ethic and the pleasure ethic (ibid. 412). Being physically healthy keeps you from “wasting time”:

“My biggest goal in life is not to pass up opportunity or not to be limited to be able to get that opportunity, and I think being physically healthy is a major component of that. If you can’t do something because you’re physically incapable of doing something you’re not going to have fun doing it. And I think my goal in life is not to miss out... As much as I possibly can, I mean I wasted enough time doing other stuff anyways. I mean we all waste time. I’m not saying we don’t, but I’m gonna try to limit it as much as possible, and I wanna take advantage of what I can do and have fun doing it”. (Lynn, 46)

Being healthy, as is evident from the above excerpt, is then also seen as having a body that is useful for the purpose of “having fun”. If you are “missing out” or “wasting time” it means that you are not living your life to your full potential. Conversely, being active, doing things, and having fun are seen as desirable ways to spend your life. Health is considered as something that sets one free from limitations of physical incapability. Physical health makes it possible for life to be experienced fully without being restricted by your own body, and CrossFit is seen as a practice that restores the capabilities of the body. The female CrossFitters feel that by doing things that they consider to be healthy they are able to affect their lives positively. The practices of health then lead to fulfillment in their everyday lives. As Crawford (1985, 81) writes: “Opposed to the language of will power and regulation, there exists a language of well-being, contentment and enjoyment. In this talk, health is understood in psychosomatic terms, instead of purely physical. It is the outcome of the enjoyment of life and the positive state of mind derived from such enjoyment.”

6.4 Food

The female CrossFitters categorize food by attaching ideas of healthiness and unhealthiness to it. In modern Western cultures people are able to control and choose their food quality and food sources more than ever before, but as Kinnunen (2001) points out, they are still concerned about the deadly and contaminating qualities of food.

Food has become a symbol for values, lifestyle and status (Kinnunen, 2001, 117). The passion with which people talk and share knowledge about food is evident among Kinnunen's bodybuilders and can also be seen with the female CrossFitters. The vocabulary involves words such as *protein, carbs (carbohydrates), protein, healthy fats, anti-inflammatory foods, gluten, raw food, processed food and organic food*.

The Paleo diet is talked about at the box and in the interviews. The Paleolithic, "caveman", diet is based on the idea that the foods that were available during the evolution of the primates, up to the emergence of modern humans, are healthier than the recently introduced ones, since our digestive and metabolic systems were not designed for the latter group. The Paleo diet comprises then of "garden vegetables, especially greens, meats, nuts and seeds, little starch, and no sugar". (Dawson, 2015, 14.) The interviewees had heard about the Paleo diet through a friend or from the coaches at the box where they trained. In the Paleo diet food is separated into the categories of clean and natural ingredients and the "un-clean" processed ones. As Dawson (2015, 14) points out, CrossFit affiliates do not prescribe or demand this diet, and more recently it is not even encouraged by a lot of CrossFitters anymore, as they have modified their ideas on what constitutes a good diet for the best possible performance. During my fieldwork, it was still talked about at the box:

"Well they encourage... Like... What's called Paleo, clean. And they kind of mix that with the Zone diet. So it's just a good mix of carbs, protein, fats, umm. And finding the healthy carbs, protein, and fat. Which I struggle with." (Amber, 52)

A stricter version of the Paleo diet is the Zone diet, which is an eating plan that recommends portion control and weighing the amounts of food eaten on every meal. Some of the women said they struggle with trying to stick to a diet, and most of the women said that they themselves did not follow the Paleo diet. The ideas adopted from Paleo were still effecting them on what they saw as healthy and unhealthy eating habits. Many of them talked about eating clean and avoiding processed foods.

"It triggered us [Cathy and her husband, who practice CrossFit together] to look into the Paleo eating, learning about the processed stuff. We kind of were already there mostly."

We really try to avoid all the processed foods and stuff like that. We are trying to do more organic... And grass fed... (Cathy, 45)

Processed food is considered something that is bad for you. It is seen as causing inflammation in the body, which then can cause illness, and is seen as something that slows down the process of getting stronger and healthier. Processed food is talked about as something potentially dangerous for the health, and for that reason scary. Contrasted to processed food is organic, natural food, and when talking about animal products like beef, grass fed seems to be the best option. This shows again how naturalness is highly valued by CrossFitters, not just when it comes to beauty ideals, but also when it comes to consumption of food products. What is considered processed food, is determined through reading the ingredients list written on the packaging of the product, and the more ingredients the product has, more likely it is highly processed. Cooking the food yourself is also encouraged for absolute control of the ingredients:

“I’ve started to become more conscious of my diet, like, not eating processed foods for example, and now that I don’t work, I’ve really gotten into cooking, so I try to, I really try to make whatever it is... Whether it’s... ketchup... So that I know what’s in it. I can try to make it with natural things that I myself have done. Because it scared me when I started to read the ingredients and certain foods. You know, there should only be about three or four things in here! And there are fifty things in here... So... That was an eye opener for me, so I try to be more conscious about it.” (Lauren, 49)

For example bread and pasta are grouped into the “unhealthy” foods list, because they can cause bloating and other symptoms that “make you feel bad”. However, the biggest enemy is found in sugar:

“We really avoid sugar. Sugar makes me feel awful, it makes me feel so bad. Like I have to go to bed basically after I eat sugar. I gave up pasta a long time ago, bread is just a very... occasional guilty pleasure. But again, it’s usually not worth it...” (Cathy, 45)

“Why do you think...? Why is sugar so bad?” (Interviewer)

“Well it’s very addictive. I think it’s addictive, it is like being addicted to smoking. Addicted to that sweet rush kind of... I think sugar has no nutritional value, so if your main diet is that... All you are getting is calories that don’t do anything for your body.

But for me... I need to go clean for a while and then introduce it back in, make it not an addiction. Ha ha ha.” (Amber, 52)

Sugar is seen as addictive and trying to give it up means that you have to go “clean”. It is then seen as something potentially “contaminating” for your body. As Douglas (1966) has written, we justify our pollution avoidances by fear of danger. The fear of pathogenicity when it comes to categorizing food, however, cannot be the only explanation, because our behavior carries symbolic meaning. With practices for avoiding illness we are separating, placing boundaries and making statements. (Ibid. 69-70.) Eating sugar is seen as a weakness and grouped together with other unhealthy habits like smoking and drinking alcohol:

“I think my weakness, if I have one, is sugar. So you know, I don’t smoke, I really don’t drink alcohol, but sugar is my weakness... So the thought of giving up sugar completely... I don’t know if I can do it... Ha ha ha. I also don’t want to be so restricted... I just wanna be better. If I can just keep getting better, I’m moving in the right direction.” (Lauren, 49)

The ideas of what the categories of healthy “clean” foods and unhealthy potentially contaminating and dangerous foods consists of seem to be shared by all of the interviewees. What then comes forth from the interviews, is how in practice these ideas are negotiated, as they are mostly not followed through with in everyday life.

“I mean, I’m not having really a diet, but I don’t eat that much bread. That’s good. I’m not addicted to chocolate, sometimes yes, but I don’t have the feeling that I need chocolate. I like umm... raw food and I love shakes. So I don’t eat all the... Of course sometimes I need a burger. But then, I don’t go to the fast food restaurant, I go to a burger restaurant. And then I have the feeling that it is homemade bread and good meat and good quality... And I mean, I love my life, so I like to drink a glass of wine, a glass of wine in the evening...” (Claudia, 33)

“So you don’t like to restrict yourself?” (Interviewer)

“I’m not good in that, yeah. I just sometimes, I need some unhealthy food. But normally I eat really very healthy.” (Claudia, 33)

“Needing” foods that are unhealthy reveals a contradiction between what is known and what is done. Crawford (1985, 92-93) points out how the health and fitness consciousness is the embodiment of the opposition of discipline and release, the contradictory mandates in the attempt to achieve health. The paradoxical nature of this opposition is evident here, because the rules about what one should and should not eat are very clearly verbalized, but such strict rules of practice are not contiguous with the element of release in search for health. Rules that are too strict can be seen as creating stress, which is also considered to be a health risk. So what is appropriated is the suitable behavior for a specific life situation, to avoid excessive stress. Known rules for healthy practices are then actively negotiated to fit other aspects of the daily routine:

“I don’t do the Paleo diet that a lot of CrossFit gyms do. I say I eat a lot more when I work out, but I do try to be more conscious of like, you know, not eating too much carbs or sugar. But it’s so stressful with school, so you grab like a handful of cake or chocolate... Chocolate is my worst enemy. But I’m just conscious about it, and eating healthy, and I don’t eat fast food. I don’t even know when was the last time that I ate fast food. But eating a well-balanced diet. So eating wisely. And regularly too, not starving yourself, like the recommended three meals a day and healthy snacks in between. But you got to eat. But eat healthy.” (Anna, 29)

Anna is aware of the categories of healthy and unhealthy foods, but the idea of balance comes forth in the above excerpt. Crawford (2006, 412-413) writes that people struggle over trying to make sense of internalized mandates of denial and pleasure, in an attempt to achieve balance. On opposing ends are discipline, sustained effort, and delayed gratification on one side, and release, desire, play, and instant gratification on the other (ibid.). What then at first glance seem like simple rules for categorizing food, in practice have much more complexity, when, as Crawford (2006, 418) has pointed out, control draws its symbolic power from its contrast with release. The conflict in experiences is explained by Crawford as the contradiction in social structure (ibid. 412.)

Anna puts emphasis on eating regularly and not starving yourself. This comes forth also in the other interviews:

“I think of eating good foods so that I can feel good in the gym and perform well, so I would never restrict myself calorically, or starve myself, or skip meals, or do any of

those things... Because then I would feel tired and I wouldn't do well here. So I feel like it helps you think more of your body like an athlete would, you know what I mean, they are not gonna restrict themselves, they are gonna think of food as, like, fuel for their bodies. Feel better and perform better.” (Hayley, 30)

The female CrossFitters are encouraged to think of their bodies like an athlete would so that they could perform better in the CrossFit practices. Feeling and performing better is achieved by fueling your body with food, not restricting yourself, and making sure you eat enough. The performance discourse takes over from the limiting and restricting “diet” discourse, and seems to be convergent with the idea of healthy feminine body being a strong and capable body in contrast to a thin body.

6.5 Good pain and bad pain

“I mean, it was hard! It was really difficult. I was in pain for one week after... It was a whole bunch of lunges that we were doing.” (Anna, 29)

“No pain, no gain” is a motto for Kinnunen’s (2001, 137) bodybuilders and also used regularly by distance runners of Richard Shipway and Immy Holloway’s study (2013, 14-15) The feeling of pain is also something that is part of CrossFitters’ lived experiences. What is talked about, is especially the excruciating pain that was experienced when the women first started to practice CrossFit. The first weeks of CrossFit practice are seen as a shock to the body that is not used to going through such hard exercise. After those first weeks the pain is seen as something that levels off, and one becomes accustomed to it, still, it is part of the everyday experience:

“Do you still get sore?” (Interviewer)

“Yes, because we work different areas, every day there is a different area. And if you keep building more weight, then you are sore. If you stay even, and don't ever improve, you would probably get used to it. But yeah, there is always some soreness. You just learn to roll it out... Ha ha ha! The more you do the easier it is.” (Amber, 52)

Pain and being sore are part of what the female CrossFitters consider a healthy practice. It is seen as something that increases health by building muscle strength. For being able to constantly improve and get stronger, one has to keep “building weight”, and that makes muscles sore. Bolin (2003) writes that bodybuilding is characterized by the pursuit and “enjoyment” of pain, and also the bodybuilders of her study equate pain with muscle growth: “*You want the pain, you want to be sore afterward... if you can’t feel the muscle, if it doesn’t hurt you won’t grow.*” (Ibid. 123.) In CrossFit, just like bodybuilding, pain acquires meaning and value in the ideas of strength and muscle growth, hence it is experienced in a positive light.

Hanold (2010) writes how pain with ultrarunners is directly related to performance, and the feeling of discomfort and “good pain” are normalized, while “bad pain” is not. This seems to be the case also with the female CrossFitters. Hanold (2010) brings forth how good pain is seen as part of the experience of running, and the nuances of pain discourse are actively negotiated by the female ultrarunners. (Ibid. 172-174.)

In their study of distance runners, Shipway and Holloway (2013, 14) talk about pain in conjunction with injury, and see it as being in conflict with the discourse of healthism. They write that the runners’ normalization of pain is almost an occupational hazard, and “fighting through injury” and “overcoming pain” are common expressions used by the runners of their study (ibid. 14-16.). When it comes to the experiences of the female CrossFitters, only bad pain is related to injury. As Hanold (2010, 172-174) points out, toughness is normalized when the pain is not debilitating, but rejected in situations that could be debilitating. In CrossFit the exercise practices are seen as being in a continuum of increasing strength and health, and if an injury happens, this disrupts the continuum by forcing a break from practices. Just like in ultrarunning (Hanold, 2010, 172), for the female CrossFitters the pain related to injury gets a different meaning because of its relation to “success” and performance that would be precluded in case of an injury. Injuries are seen as a failure to listen to one's body, "letting your ego take control", and using your body in a way that is not encouraged. Injuries are common and accepted as part of training hard and pushing through your limits. But they are not seen in positive light, and definitely not "a badge of honor" that Shipway and Holloway (2013, 16) mention to be the case with distance runners.

“I had hurt myself several times because of my competitive nature, and trying to keep up with everybody. I had done a few back strains, nothing serious, but it would be bad enough where I would have to sit out for a week or so. Which was frustrating and so... I had already learned how to listen to my body a little bit more... Which I think is... For me it was a process because I had not done any weight... like this, at all. So I didn't really know how to pay attention to, ok, that is getting tight, I better back off and not do that one last rep or add weight. I think because I had that knowledge and I learned so much the first time, that when I came back I just haven't had any injuries this time. Which has been awesome!” (Caitlyn, 46)

Missing practice for a week because of injury creates frustration, so the goal for the women is always to avoid injuries. This can be done by “listening to your body”. The female CrossFitters are encouraged to pay attention to how their body is feeling, and to notice the most diminutive changes they experience, so that they would know when to back off and stop, and not push themselves too far. Individuals are considered partly responsible for their own injuries, but the importance of good coaching and a good box are also mentioned:

“Yeah people do get hurt. That's another argument that people have against CrossFit. But that all comes down to the trainers, coaches, and each box. It's actually any individual box. It gives CrossFit a bad name, when it's the fault of the box. If you get good coaching and good programming, you don't get any athletes that are injured. I'm not injured, because I don't hurt myself that much today anymore if I stretch out, mobilize beforehand and get good coaching and have coaches that actually do pay attention.” (Anna, 29)

Differences between the boxes are stressed when getting hurt is talked about as being preventable by good coaching and good programming. Stretching and mobilizing, just like listening to your body and not pushing yourself too far are seen as the things that an individual can do to prevent injuries, but to be able to learn these practices, one needs coaches who “pay attention” and teach them. The responsibility for injuries is then shared with the coaches that are trusted so much as to be put in the position of looking after ones health.

Shipway and Holloway (2013, 14-17) write that the distance runners' stories of pain and injury do not always follow the well-defined traditional lines of the health discourse as provided by social policies, medical guidelines or conventional perceptions of everyday life, as they are willing to go beyond the boundaries of their bodies during training. Pain and injury can be pushed aside when they practice running to excess (ibid. 16). This can be seen to some extent with the female CrossFitters as they sometimes continue training after the injury. Injury and the bad pain related to it are to be taken seriously, but if only possible, the practices should be continued in spite of being injured. It is then encouraged to work around the pain through concentrating on different parts of the body:

“I hurt my ankle so I just do upper body until it’s totally healed. So there’s always something you can do. One of our coaches hurt her arm, and she still coached and came in and worked the other arm and worked her legs, so you know.” (Amber, 52)

Splitting the body into different parts through the separation of muscle groups, like bodybuilders do in their training (Kinnunen, 2001; Klein, 1993), is usually not encouraged in CrossFit, where the body is seen as a functional whole. However, in case of an injury, alternative methods are put to use for preventing a break in the practices. This means scaling the workouts, so that the bad pain is avoided, and concentrating to train the muscles of the lower body if one experiences pain related to injury on their upper body, and vice versa.

Evident in CrossFit, just like with ultra- and distance runners and bodybuilders (Hanold, 2010; Shipway and Holloway, 2013; Kinnunen, 2001; Bolin, 2003), is that physical pain is hard to avoid in the quest for health and well-being. Just like with food, the women negotiate the appropriate action to be taken up in practice. Health, which encompasses the idea of a strong and capable body, is a priority, but how to get there is a complex process and dependent on individual’s life situation. What all these women seem to agree on, is that CrossFit can help them in the attainment of that goal.

7 Community

“I remember her saying community is a big thing, I was like uh, that doesn’t really sound like me. I don’t know if I’m gonna like that. But we went to the classes and everybody was so, there was, every single time there was at least one person, but usually more, who would come to us and say, hi my name is... Good job... High five... whatever. That made it a lot easier, and then, since then, I like that part actually!”
(Cathy, 45)

The communal aspect of CrossFit is emphasized and seen as a big part of the phenomenon. It is something that comes up in all of the interviews. The community is described as being supportive and inspiring, and for many of the female CrossFitters I interviewed it is the main reason why they keep coming back to the box. In this chapter I will examine how the sense of community at the CrossFit box is experienced by the female CrossFitters, and how the practices of CrossFit can be seen as liminal-like and transformative.

7.1 Difference from a “typical” gym

What comes forth in the interviews is how the female CrossFitters seem to separate themselves from people who do not practice CrossFit. A clear distinction is made between other sports, especially bodybuilding, as was evident in the interviewees’ adoption of the “naturalness” discourse presented in chapter five. The superiority of a box in relation to a “normal”, “regular” or “typical” gym is also emphasized:

“I think that with CrossFit you get the support from each other while doing these crazy WODs. I think it helps and it makes CrossFit unique environment. You don’t get that in 24hour Fitness, LA Fitness, you’re lifting by yourself or maybe one other person. And you don’t get the support. You get the people looking at you, what is she doing? It’s funny too, and I don’t go to those 24hour Fitness or anything, because girls go in there all decked out in make-up, wearing just sports bras. It’s just not something that you do in CrossFit. It’s a completely different world, you go to a CrossFit gym or you go to the

24hour Fitness. In those regular gyms, you don't get that community that you get in CrossFit. You know, it's a whole different world. I think that girls who go to 24hour Fitness are looking to hook up almost! Because they are all decked out in make-up. (Anna, 29)

CrossFit is experienced as something unique. The support that one gets when going through the WOD is contrasted to the feeling of being judged in a “typical” gym environment. When talking about other gyms, the women mean well-known big American gym chains like 24hour Fitness and LA Fitness. Wearing make-up at the gym is seen as futile, because the purpose of going to gym is not to “hook up”. These attitudes seem to be contiguous with the ideas of “natural” beauty, but they also show how for the female CrossFitters the box is a space where the social aspect of training is emphasized, and not seen as having sexual undertones. Instead it is experienced as having more of a family-like quality:

“I like that it's a community. It's not like a gym or a class. Everybody gets to know everybody, and everybody is helpful, it's just... It's like a family. And in the meantime you get healthy.” (Amber, 52)

The way that the CrossFit community is described as a family suggests a certain type of closeness among the participants; a closeness that, according to Dawson (2015) can help people even overcome adversity. She uses an example from a CrossFitter Allison Belger who says that if she were faced with a tragedy, she would want to be surrounded by the warmth and camaraderie of her gym community (ibid. 5). The CrossFit family is seen as something that can help you get healthy and strong, but also help you with the problems you face in your everyday life.

Contrasted to the CrossFit practices, the practices in the “typical” gym are seen as lacking focus, and not providing any results in one's endeavor for health:

“Well I don't like the typical gyms. I never felt like I got... I never felt like I had a focus when I was there. I would work out for hours at the gym. I am not kidding. I get off work. And I would go there from five-thirty to seven-thirty or eight at night. I would lift weights and I would run for an hour. And then I'd walk it out. I was doing all these things and feeling like I was not getting anywhere.” (Lynn, 46)

”Not getting anywhere” suggests that the goal that Lynn is working towards seems to be more difficult to achieve in the “typical” gym environment. Through the programming and recording the workouts CrossFit creates a feeling of effectiveness and focus:

“When you go to CrossFit, you’re there to get things done. I have a purpose and a mentality, I’m going, and I’m going to attack that WOD!” (Anna, 29)

The self-discipline and self-surveillance through recording the workouts are complemented by the attitude of doing the work. Attacking the WOD is a mentality that “gets things done”. As Sassatelli (2010, 206) points out, fitness culture demonstrates the ambiguity of the notion of free time. Although opposed to work, it is organized through elements which derive from the world of work (ibid. 207). The society that values efficacy and performance is reflected in the activities taken up by these women in their “free” time. Crawford (1985) writes that continuous striving for self-improvement is part of the internalization of the value of self-creation characteristic of the middle class in industrial, capitalist societies, when leisure, or “down time” is converted to “up time” (ibid. 69-70).

The hard work and focus becomes easier with the help from the CrossFit community. Karen had, at the time of the interview, practiced CrossFit just eight months and described the gym she used to go to prior to starting CrossFit as a “fancy” gym with an espresso bar in the middle. She said that the box she goes to now is definitely not a fancy place, but what she really likes about CrossFit is that she is able to do “crazy stuff” she never even thought possible:

“I think at the normal gym it was pretty easy to cheat, I did classes a lot, so I’d be on a big class of eighty women doing Zumba all together. So part of the time it was hard to move it was so crowded, you didn’t really have to work that hard. But this is... I mean, they push you to do things... Not Zumba. All this crazy stuff that I didn’t even know that I could do. But I like it so much better.” (Karen, 48)

Pushing through the workout is seen as something that the community helps you with, because they make you accountable and make it impossible for you to “cheat” in the workouts.

“I think that in the time that I’ve been going to CrossFit, I’ve worked harder than I ever did, in nine years of going to the fancy gym. And I went, I went often. But I never worked that hard. Because no one was pushing me. It was all very anonymous. They were nice people, I said hi to them, but nobody was like... I see you’re cheating, put more weight on! I know you can do more...” (Karen, 48)

Dawson (2015) writes that in traditional gyms the clientele are able to create virtual boundaries between themselves and others by listening to music, or reading, or watching television while working out, when the box on the other hand offers very little opportunity to be autonomous or anonymous. The option of physically or mentally cutting oneself off is not available to CrossFitters. (Ibid. 4.)

The lack of mirrors in the box can also be seen to direct the focus from yourself to others, and creating a space that encourages, as Dawson (2015, 4) points out, “active participation and interaction”.

“I had never thought about the lack of mirrors... but I think it’s huge. That you’re not focused on yourself all the time, you’re actually there to... Not only do your own thing, but to support other people!” (Cathy, 45)

Markula (2003) writes that in aerobic studios the mirrors may facilitate the comparison of bodies between the exercisers. She points out that the societal emphasis on the female body is reflected in such comparisons in terms of body, but not skill. Women have internalized checking out their bodies in aerobics rather than contrasting physical skills because their value in society is strongly connected to their attractiveness instead of their performance. (Ibid. 63-64.) Bodybuilders also use mirrors to visually assess their bodies. Their relationship with the mirrors is, however, also connected to performance as they keep checking the right form of certain movements through the mirror. Still, this makes bodybuilders focus on themselves and the practice can be seen as performed together but immersing in oneself. (Kinnunen, 2001, 71-72, and Klein, 125.) These practices are turned around at a CrossFit box, where the secretive gaze of assessing your own body and the bodies of others through the mirrors, is forced into a direct look and face to face evaluation of the posture and skill of others. When performing weightlifting movements in a mirrorless space, the correct form has to be checked by other people, by

the trainer or a training partner. This creates an environment where engaging in interaction with others is unavoidable. Hence, the lack of mirrors in the exercise space creates an environment where people are working out together, instead of "individuals coming together to exercise alone in a group setting" (Markula 2006. 76).

7.2 “Cultishness” of CrossFit

The CrossFit community plays a big role in the female CrossFitter’s lives. It helps them to focus and achieve results and they describe it as family-like and supportive. However, from the outsider’s point of view the discursive practices of the CrossFit community can seem somewhat closed off, pretentious or intimidating. Many CrossFitters feel that they want to “spread the word” of healthy living, and this does not always create a positive reaction in people who do not practice CrossFit:

“My friends [who practice CrossFit], they have stickers on their car to let people know they are part of it. Definitely... Like, right now I have a cup cake and ice cream sitting in front of me, and they would definitely talk about that, like, they would say, you’re a fatass! They would like joke about it... But half true... Like they see problem in how you eat, and be somewhat judgey to... Like, when you say you wanna look a certain way but you’re not doing something to change that.” (Emma, 32, does not practice CrossFit)

“It’s an ego thing, I think it’s an ego thing, like people who follow tour de France. They are always yakking about who’s the lead!” (Amanda, 56, does not practice CrossFit)

Dawson (2015, 12) refers to CrossFitters, who tend to be evangelical about the form of physical activity they practice, as evanGYMists. This can be seen as one of the reasons why CrossFit has acquired its reputation as a “cult”. CrossFit as a cult comes up in most of the interviews as the female CrossFitters reflect on the image of CrossFit on the media:

“I think a lot of it... There’s a lot of misconception on the internet. There are people who bash on CrossFit, and I think that it is because they don’t know what it is. So a lot of people think it’s a cult. I mean at first when I started, when I heard it from my

brother I immediately imagined in my head, like, people flipping tires and jumping off boxes and throwing weight, that's what I thought! And so... I was sceptic when I didn't know it. And the thing is that a lot of people think that we are just crazy people, throwing, yelling and screaming. And it's not that. I mean CrossFit allows us to push ourselves. To thrive and set new goals. Find out new boundaries.” (Anna, 29)

Most of the opinions of people who do not practice CrossFit are brushed off as misconceptions by the female CrossFitters. What can appear to the outsiders as a group of crazy people, throwing, yelling and screaming, is a practice that the women feel allows them to push themselves, to thrive, and to find new boundaries. Thus, the positive experience of CrossFit practice for the interviewees outweighs the negative comments.

Conversely, some of the women point to the other CrossFitters as the ones who are creating the image of “cultishness”:

“Sometimes people take it way... The cultishness of it... Way too seriously. You know, what works for other people doesn't work for other people, not everybody has the joy... Someone is not weak because they didn't do it. You do whatever works for you. This works for me. It's perfect for me. (...) So the cultishness of it is a little bit annoying...” (Lynn, 46)

“Cultishness” means that a person is taking their practice too seriously, and trying to convince others of the superiority of their practice. One of the interviewees also described it as someone “boasting” about their accomplishments. Boasting is not seen as completely negative, but it is seen as adding to the negative image of CrossFit as a “cult”. Dawson (2015) points out that some CrossFitters nevertheless have themselves appropriated the cult label and recast it in a positive light. Herz (2014, 237) writes that CrossFit is a *good* cult, and refers to what Greg Glassman has said: “Maybe it [CrossFit] is a cult, where people get really fit and support each other”.

Dawson (2015, 6) points to the cult-like characteristics encompassed in CrossFit: *“Devotion to the leader, assumption of an exalted status, censure of dissent, gradual inability to relate to outsiders, willingness to do whatever it takes to achieve the goal and a desire to recruit more members.”* Dawson writes that CrossFit represents an

intersection of military and religion, the recurrent themes in all of them being “mutual connection and identification derived from shared and sometimes grueling experience, as well as being motivated by guilt and piety” (ibid. 6). Clearly the cult-like characteristics that Dawson brings forth cannot be generalized to include all people who practice CrossFit, but it offers some insight into why so many people see similarities with CrossFit and religious phenomena.

According to Dawson (2015, 7), the crucial point of difference between cult and CrossFit, despite the levels of commitment shown by devotees and the personal transformation that subscribers may undergo, is that CrossFit is a voluntary practice, in that it offers voluntary entry and exit. Dawson (2015) then brings forth a concept of reinventive institution, which she applies to CrossFit. She sees CrossFit as a greedy institution, reaching into the everyday lives of its adherents, and creating generic CrossFit identities through reinvention of selves and mutual surveillance (ibid.). In the interviews with the female CrossFitters, what seems to come forth though, is a process of negotiating different practices of CrossFit. The women reflect on their own participation in the phenomenon and fit the practice around their individual life situations. They create new gender identities without completely discarding the old self, but adding to it, as the feminine CrossFit identity brings another layer to the gender identity that is fluid and constantly in transition through performative actions. Concentrating on the lived experience of female CrossFitters, I then turn to Victor Turner’s (1974) theory of liminal phenomena, which I see offering a more flexible analytical tool that also accounts for the affectual and antistructural aspects in CrossFit practice.

7.3 Liminality of WOD and bonding in suffering

CrossFit has been referred to as a cult because of the characteristics that remind people of religious phenomena. Turner (1974) calls these type of phenomena liminal or liminoid, which both share the feature of playfulness from which emerge new, expressive possibilities and modes of self-representation. According to Turner, liminality is found in modern societies in churches, sects and movements. For him,

sport in consumer culture belongs to a sphere of leisure, which means it should be referred to as a liminoid phenomenon; being close to liminal, but not identical to it. (Ibid. 86.). Liminoid phenomena are not obligatory, but rather voluntarily chosen and competing with other commodities in a market of liminoid choices. (Rowe, 2008, 130-131.) However, this division has been proven to be artificial as modern societies have qualities from both categories (Spiegel, 2011; Brownell, 2001), the work and leisure are intermingled, and consumer choice can become a moral choice of choosing “betterment” and “good life”. CrossFit can then be seen as a practice that has qualities of both phenomena, liminal and liminoid.

Following van Gennep’s three partitive model of rites of passage, Turner (1974) divides transition rites in three stages: separation, transition and incorporation. Sassatelli (2010, 50-51) examined a ritual nature of a changing room in the gym, and showed how through changing rooms, the individuals must negotiate, both symbolically and practically their entrance into the world of fitness training and their return to the outside world in the sequence of activities such as: undressing, dressing, exercising, undressing, showering, grooming and dressing again. Just like in Sassatelli’s (2010) keep-fit training, in CrossFit participants have to go through activities of removing themselves from symbols of everyday life and status, such as clothes and jewelry, and leave their social identities at home or in changing rooms. Known as a rule of conduct at the box; “*leave your ego at the door*” speaks for the equality and a status-free zone, where your age, your job or your gender do not define you. At the box everybody is thought of as equal and everybody is expected to do the same thing. Roles and rules of everyday life are suspended or inverted in the stage of in-betweenness, as “*communitas*” emerges in the context of antistructural suspension of the ordinary. (Turner, 1974.)

Some of the properties that Turner (1969) describes as pertaining to the state of liminality are: *Totality, communitas, equality, anonymity, absence of status, uniform clothing, minimization of sex distinctions, humility, disregard of personal appearance, no distinction of wealth, unselfishness, total obedience, acceptance of pain and suffering*. These are contrasted to the properties of the status system: *Partiality, structure, inequality, system of nomenclature, status, distinctions of clothing, maximization of sex distinctions, just pride of position, care for personal appearance, distinctions of wealth, selfishness, obedience only to superior rank, avoidance of pain*

and suffering. (Turner, 1969, 366.)

The liminal properties are evident in CrossFit's WOD when people take part in a ritual, where through scaling the workouts, everybody is put on the same level and goes through the same practices. During the WOD, your name, sex, wealth, and personal appearance do not matter as you are immersed in a total obedience where pain and suffering are not only accepted, but are an essential part of the experience. In CrossFit, just like in liminality, the past is momentarily negated and the future has not yet begun, and there is "an instant of pure potentiality when everything trembles in the balance" (Turner, 1974, 75). The pain and suffering during the WOD is experienced as transient, and it is seen as a preparation for the hardships that one encounters in life. Practices that a person goes through in a WOD are then not always seen as fun or pleasant, but they are seen as necessary stages one has to go through to reach the full potentiality of a healthy and capable body. Handling suffering is part of the transformation into a stronger self, which is the embodiment of moral values of betterment and work ethic.

"We are not meant to be happy all the time, or feel good all the time. Life has challenges, and we need to learn and prove to ourselves that we can handle suffering. All of these emotions, they just pass through us, and we just need to feel them while they are there and they'll move on, so I think for me... I know there is a transient nature to it, and I have accepted that as part of my strength gain... I mean, there's an end gain in all of this. It's not for nothing. And it's temporary, it's transient." (Caitlyn, 46)

Pushing yourself through the mental and physical barriers during the workout can then be seen as having an element of the Foucauldian self-discipline and self-surveillance that was brought forth in previous chapters, but this does not seem to alone explain what happens during the WOD. The brief moment of pain and agony, which can be seen as a liminal period in time, is experienced together with other people, and appears to get its meaning also through the community that is formed through bonding in suffering:

"So I'm not throwing up, I'm not passing out, I'm not doing that. But I will push myself enough where I'm like, oh god, I'm not comfortable... And again especially depending on who your cohorts are in your classes. There's bonding in that. Bonding in suffering, just like you can bond in exuberance in life. And you're together with people, and

you're just holding this brief moment of pain and agony.” (Caitlyn, 46)

Atkinson (2008, 175) uses an idea of “pain community” when he describes participation in triathlon. He sees triathlon as a liminal activity, where the emotional and physical stress produced in training and competition is utilized by triathletes as a tool for emotional stimulation (ibid. 165-166). Atkinson writes how triathletes build their bodies socially, consistently and aggressively. After the initial pain barriers are overcome and the bodies get used to the training, the participants individually and collectively begin to explore the liminal and exciting personal aspects of sports-related suffering. (Ibid. 175.) Like Atkinson’s triathletes, CrossFitters are taking part in pain community, where the meaning of their practice is not just in the bodies it produces, but in the practice itself. The bonding experience comes from this mentally and physically challenging practice that seems to create an intensive sense of togetherness:

“The way that I understand it... Because it feels familiar to me. You bond in this intensive environment, where you are really pushing yourselves, and there is an element of suffering and questioning your ability and capability, and you connect in that suffering, I think. And it reminds me of when I was in medical training. You’re in this... Because you’re in this intensive environment that is very, I guess, intellectually and psychologically challenging... And physically challenging. And you get really close in that experience. And I feel like there’s a similar thing that happens for me here. Like we all understand that this is really hard. And that’s... There’s something special in that. That you are pushing yourself here, it’s a bonding experience.” (Caitlyn, 46)

The reason why the women keep coming back to the practices is the empowerment they feel from the transformation of their bodies, strength and gender identity, but also the experience of the practice itself and the ritual activity, where the significance is found in the *doing*.

7.4 Flow and *communitas*

As previously mentioned in chapter four, CrossFit’s website states that CrossFit community is something that “spontaneously arises when people do the workouts

together” (What is CrossFit? 2015). This seems to refer to what Turner (1974, 79) calls “spontaneous communitas” that emerges in liminality. Spontaneous communitas is a single, synchronized, fluid event which people become totally absorbed in. It exists in contrast to social structure, as an alternative and more “liberated” way of being socially human. (Ibid. 79-82.)

Turner (1974, 87-88) sees communitas and liminal activities being connected to the feeling of flow. Flow is a concept which he adopts from Mihail Csikszentmihalyi (Hunter and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Turner (1974, 79) writes that flow may induce communitas and communitas may induce flow. According to Turner, what happens in flow is a centering of attention, specifically achieved in sport through rules and competitiveness. This makes the mind focus in a certain pre-determined direction. (Ibid. 87.) In CrossFit centering of attention is achieved through the unambiguousness of what needs to be done, as the structure and rules of a class are clearly verbalized. People are put on the same level with scaling the workout, so that everybody, no matter what the level of skill of that person is, is going through the same experience of pushing their body to its limits. According to Heywood (2015), the intensity and the metabolic demands of the WOD are so high that one would not be able to sustain the activity if it was not for a flow experience. Heywood explains flow experience as being so focused on the movement that it creates a sense of being “out of time” or performing “in the zone”, it is a single-minded immersion in the activity. (2015, 26-27.)

The following is an excerpt from my own field diary, where I try to articulate a flow experience through a description of a single WOD:

“The only thing that exists is you and that fourteen pound medicine ball that you have to throw to a nine foot high target. On the way down you have to catch the ball and lower yourself to a full squat position. The goal is to keep going as fast as you can, as many reps as possible until the twelve minute time period ends. And in that twelve minutes you go through a spectrum of emotions. The tiredness sets in after just a couple of minutes. It feels like this is not going to end well. After five minutes the fear of failure is replaced by the annoyance in the insufficiency of my own body. And from somewhere within me I find the strength to continue. After eight minutes I’m sure that this is the point where I would’ve stopped before, but something inexplicable inside me keeps me

going. This is crazy, this is stupid, I'm thinking, until I lose the track of time and can't even think anymore. I feel like everybody in that room is moving in a synchronic harmony. But the only thing that matters is my own heartbeats and the rush of blood through my veins. Finally I hear the beep of the timer and the coach's words: Done. I look around and everybody is just as tired as I am. But they are smiling, and that makes me smile." (Field diary, autumn 2014.)

The intensity of the workout and the expectation for everyone in the class to finish the workout creates a space where you feel that you are required to push your boundaries and try your hardest. Heywood (2015, 27) writes that the group setting combined with the level of intensity of the CrossFit class makes the peak experiences of flow possible. Turner (1974, 88) writes that in flow the action and awareness is merged, but one cannot be aware that they are aware. Flow becomes the purpose of sport participation, instead of it being other rewards and motivations. In flow, the self becomes irrelevant, which leads to loss of ego. With the loss of self, however, mental awareness is heightened. All men and even all things are felt to be one, subjectively, in the flow experience. In the ritualized limits of the sport a person feels in control of his/her actions and of the environment, and there is no fear. (Ibid. 88.)

"Everybody was scared at first. But if you're willing to do it, then everybody is really going to help you at least emotionally give you whatever you need. So I like that. I think everybody is pretty willing to say I'm going to show up, and I'm just going to be there." (Cathy, 45)

Being there, and especially being there for each other becomes important. Also being emotionally available is encouraged. The female CrossFitters seem to value qualities that Turner (1974, 79) appoints as having high value in spontaneous communitas: personal honesty, openness, and lack of pretentiousness. According to Turner (1974, 89) flow can transform structure to communitas, but it has to happen spontaneously, even if it is induced in the context of subscription to rules. Turner writes that people seek this type of unmediated communion with one another through the techniques of flow (ibid. 89). In the context of CrossFit, "putting your heart out there" is seen as a willingness to engage in direct human interaction:

“And if you’re willing to try, and you’re willing to put your heart out there, everybody will cheer you on. What I love about this sport, one of the things I absolutely love about this sport, is that the person that finishes last usually gets cheered on the most, and no one is gonna leave you out there hanging.” (Lynn, 46)

Cheering each other on is how support for other people is shown most explicitly.

However, the act of cheering and the interactions it propels can also create pressure to some people to do well in the eyes of others. If the failure to perform well in WOD is experienced, it can make you feel bad:

“There was one exercise that we did, not very long ago... And I really didn’t like it at all. I felt like I was... They divided us into teams, and there were people on the team that were young and very fast runners. So the exercise was that we had to run 400 meters, which is around the building with one of those heavy balls, the wall ball. And the first person would run with the ball and then you pass it... And when the last person gets the ball they had to sprint to the front and then pass it, pass it, pass it... But I just felt like I was letting the team down. Because first of all, there’s no way I could pass them if I didn’t have a heavy ball. So I just felt... It made me feel bad. That was the only time that I went to CrossFit that I was like... I don’t like the way I feel because now they had to do extra burpees, because the other team that won said that you guys lost so you have to do fifteen burpees. And it was all in fun, but I felt bad.” (Karen, 48)

Turner (1974, 87) writes that if the flow breaks, it creates awareness of self, which can ruin the experience, as shown by what happened to Karen in the above excerpt. Flow-break happens when a person starts to reflect on her action and this creates an anti-flow experience where “pleasure gives way to problem, to worry, to anxiety” (Turner, 1974, 87).

Flow is experienced within an individual, whereas *communitas* is between and among individuals (Turner, 1974, 89). *Communitas* has to do with dialogue, with words as well as non-verbal means of communication, such as understanding smiles, nodding, and so on, between people. (Ibid. 89.) It seems that CrossFit practice is designed to induce the flow experience that can sometimes lead to the manifestation of the anti-structural spontaneous *communitas*. The attempts to make it a more permanent state of the

structure can then lead to a threat of what Turner (1974, 81) calls “the suffocation of *communitas*”. It is not possible to sustain the spontaneity and immediacy of *communitas* long. This is when *communitas* develops a social structure, and free relationships between individuals become converted to norm-governed relationships. (Ibid. 78.) This comes forth from how some of the female CrossFitters feel like the community is not always what it ought to be:

“It can get cliquy, you know what I mean, sometimes in that way... There can be the popular kids... High school, you know. And I don’t think... I think that’s typical when you have large groups of people get together. It’s a human interactions that I think that no matter what the focus is of the gym, it’s hard to walk away from that, it’s gonna happen. I think that’s probably my... I don’t like it because of... Because you know we are all here for the same reason, but I think it’s hard to avoid it.” (Lynn, 46)

Interaction with people at the box is then not always seen in a positive light. What is meant by the group getting “cliquy”, is that the group gets divided into other subgroups. For Turner (1974), spontaneous *communitas* is something that cannot be sustained for long. It only exists for the ritual and then dissipates as the everyday structures of status take place. *Communitas* that exists in liminality, cannot then be appropriated to everyday life through trying to extend those ties. (Ibid. 78.) CrossFit community arises from people doing workouts together, but seems to also be extended to friendships outside of the box:

“Really the community here... I have just found that the types of folks, especially in my 9.15. They have become my good friends. I have made wonderful friends here who come from all sorts of different places in life that I would normally never meet! Who are just really wonderful people, very humble and smart and motivated, and not afraid to push themselves. So it’s been easy to make close connections. And they are close enough, like, we went to the beach... I’ve done that a few times. CrossFit ladies weekends at the beach, we do stuff like that. Handful of us met up last night, they are such great people!” (Caitlyn, 46)

Many of the interviewees feel that they have made good friends with people they met through CrossFit. After the WOD is done people often start to share their feelings, pains

and personal experiences of the workout with each other. This type of sharing can manifest itself in long conversations where knowledge about movements, bodies and diets are shared, but it can also move on to life stories and other types of personal sharing. Turner (1974) brings up a concept of “normative communitas” as he describes the attempts to maintain relationships of spontaneous communitas on a more or less permanent basis. He also points out that the feelings of “freedom”, “liberation” or “love” which are the features of spontaneous communitas, adhere to normative communitas. (Ibid. 80.) Spontaneous communitas and normative communitas are connected. In the liminal ritual of WOD the experiences of spontaneous communitas are possible, but outside the practice some of that feeling might be lost when the normal signs of status return.

Turner (1974, 81) explains that there is a process of transformation that the communitas goes through as the people who have experienced the spontaneous communitas together will eventually develop structures and rules of behavior. Normative communitas is born as a spontaneous communitas, but as it is made into an ongoing repetitive social system it loses some of its “nature” (ibid.). Turner (1974, 82) points out how communitas tends to be inclusive and social structure tends to be exclusive, even snobbish, relishing the distinction between we/they and in-group/out-group. Like shown in the beginning of this chapter, the female CrossFitters also separated themselves from people who do not practice CrossFit, creating the separation between in-group and out-group. Also Atkinson (2008) writes about the triathletes’ unspoken sense of achieved social status in comparison to “they”, the outsiders. He points out that the health and body consciousness developed by these athletes penetrates their everyday assessments of others’ eating, exercise, work and relationship habits condemning the apathetic, morally and physically uncivilized mass of homogeneous social “others”. (Ibid. 172-178.) This is evident also in CrossFit, but what seems to create a contradiction in this phenomenon is that in spite of the visible group lines from other gyms and other practices, CrossFit seems to nevertheless be very inclusive, as it is open to everybody, CrossFitters are actively encouraging others to join in their practices. It seems that people in CrossFit are then looking for the type of direct human interaction experienced in spontaneous communitas, and as Turner (1974, 82) has noted: “The drive for inclusivity makes for proselytization. One wants to make the Others, We.”

CrossFit has been talked about as having cult-like characteristics. It has been compared to religious phenomena, because of its liminal qualities. CrossFit works as a liminal space where the women take part in a ritual in a status-free zone. The female CrossFitters experience their CrossFit practice as transformational, as through pain and suffering they embody the moral values of modern society and are reinvented as athletes. The structure of a CrossFit class induces the experiences of flow that can then lead to spontaneous *communitas*. This is a communion of a group of people that takes on more of an “authentic” and direct form of interaction in comparison to the normative social structure. According to Turner (1974), the anti-structural inversions in liminal phenomena work for maintaining the social structure, when on the other hand his other concept of liminoid genres encompasses the potential for change. The shortcoming of Turner’s theory is the binary opposition that does not account for the fluidity and processual nature of sport as a ritual phenomenon that includes in reality some characteristics from both of these categories. CrossFit then is a practice that brings forth questions about the ambivalence of consumer choice, and the seriousness of leisure for doing the work on our bodies and selves. It is a practice that an individual chooses from the variety of exercise options, as they choose a moral value of bettering themselves. It also offers a potentiality for subversion and creating new ideas. The ritual performance of WOD can invert weakness to strength, insecurity to assertiveness and incapability to ability, but what makes it a subversive experience for these women, is how these inversions translate to everyday life. As Turner (1974, 65) writes, leisure genres can promote change in the structures of society through creating new ways of thinking and being.

8 Concluding words

This thesis focuses on the female CrossFitters' experiences, the way they construct femininity in the context of CrossFit, and the meanings they give their practices. I have looked at these questions in light of the three main themes that have arisen from the interviews; strength, health and community. The perspective that I have applied throughout this study has been to look at the body as a combination of the social symbolic body, the lived and embodied body and the disciplined political body. This means that the body is a functional, thinking, experiencing and performing symbol that is constructed in and through discourses of power, with the ability to create new symbols and cultural meanings within the existing power structures.

Many of the previous studies on women's bodies and sport have dealt with a question of whether women through their sporting practices are resisting the hegemonic beauty ideals or conforming to them. Markula (1995) has then directed us to look at the complexity and richness of the lived experiences of the women, and I have followed her in seeing how the female CrossFitters of this study negotiate different practices and discourses. Feminine CrossFit body is built through the practices of strength and multiplicity of discourses of health and beauty, and it emerges in contradiction to the feminine thin body ideal. Asserting one's independence and capability as well as not being afraid to take up space through increased musculature can be seen as resisting an idea of women as a weaker sex but at the same time conforming to the new ideal of a strong, natural, healthy and capable body.

In the context of CrossFit, women discipline their bodies and render them "docile" through what Foucault (1977; 1980) calls technologies of self, as they are encouraged to get physically strong and push through mental and physical boundaries. Knapp (2015) has examined how gender is reproduced and resisted through sociospatial interactions within a CrossFit box, and I have extended my study outside the box to look at how these meanings are experienced by the women in their everyday lives. Through continual performing of the WOD the women embody strength and experience a transformation that extends to their lives outside the box, and in this process they start to appreciate a body that looks strong and more muscular. Muscles become a symbol for

determination and independence.

Strength is thought of as both physical and mental. Pushing through pain, finishing the workout and showing mental toughness is as important in CrossFit as the physical side to it. In training, one learns that the mind fails before the body, so controlling the mind is paramount. Just like with Hanold's (2010) ultrarunners, however, pushing through pain is only related to good pain, when bad pain is something that should be taken seriously as it can conclude performance. Pain is always negotiated in a way that it does not come in the way of performance. Performance is seen as important and it also becomes a positive value as an embodied aspect of the body. Chase (2006) and Hanold (2010) have written how the women's sporting bodies have more to do with how well they perform at their chosen sport than the way they look, and this is evident also in CrossFit. For the female CrossFitters the focus shifts from the looks and the size to being able to get stronger and perform well in the CrossFit practices. This then creates more space for the idea that different bodies can be beautiful. The discourses about mental and physical toughness and shared experience of embodied strength can then be seen as practices that empower these women. However, the demand for bodies to be capable and strong can be just as restrictive as the thin ideal as it is exclusive of weak, injured and obese bodies that can be seen as incapable.

The idea of a strong capable body is connected to the idea of health. In the achievement of that goal, and the performance discourse related to it, different practices are employed and negotiated. Heywood (2015, 30) writes that the cultural context where CrossFit emerged was that of globalized neoliberalism, and its obsession with measuring and providing results. Some people have taken this to the extremes with monitoring their every move with devices that track heartrate, quality of sleep, calorie consumption and distances walked or ran, in purpose of analyzing all this information to the attainment of their health potential (Lupton, 2013). CrossFit can be seen as a practice that is in conjunction with these type of phenomena where the goal is to realize the potentiality of a human body. Health has become individual's responsibility (Crawford, 1985; 2000; 2006), and becoming a better version of oneself reflects the moral values of the modern society where consumerism and work ethic are intermingled.

The female CrossFitters of this study practice what Crawford (1985; 2000; 2006) has pointed to as the opposing mandates of discipline and release. “Health talk” is put to use by the women as they group food, pain and everyday habits into categories of “healthy” and “unhealthy”. By doing things that are considered healthy, the CrossFitters feel that they can achieve overall health, which equates to youthfulness, capabilities and toughness of the body and mind. Being tough and strong makes a person more functional. By being more functional, one is able to accomplish things better in everyday life, and ultimately it makes for a better life. As shown in the discourses adopted by the interviewees, however, the rules of health are also negotiated and only followed through in practice when they do not create additional stress. As Crawford (1985; 2000; 2006) notes, opposing mandates of health promotion, as discipline and release and control and pleasure, create a contradiction in the experience, and individual life situations become important in negotiating rules of food and healthy practices to achieve balance. Consuming food, even if it is categorized as unhealthy, becomes healthy when it is done in the avoidance of stress. Evident then, in how the female CrossFitters talk about health and practices related to it, is that people’s everyday life experiences are fragmented and fluctuating, leaving room for creating changes in meanings.

The women’s CrossFit practice can be seen as a modern ritual that encompasses qualities of both, liminal and liminoid phenomena (Turner, 1974). The crude binarism of Turner’s categorization can be avoided as we look at sport, following Spiegel (2011), as a real life experience in a continuum where traditional and modern, liminal and liminoid qualities get blended. Sassatelli (2010, 1) has pointed out that the fit body displays vitality and control, power and utility, and has become a powerful icon of contemporary Western culture. It can be seen as a status symbol in a modern society where work ethic, betterment, discipline and working to achieve something have gained moral value. In CrossFit value is attained through taking part in transformational liminal practices where athletic skills and abilities are acquired through grueling workouts. The values and structures of the society are reinforced in fitness and health practices such as CrossFit, as it works like the rites of passage model in producing athletic, in shape bodies with exalted status.

The reason why the women keep coming back to the practices is the combination of the

empowerment they feel from the change that happens in their bodies, strengths and gender identity, but also the experience of flow and *communitas* that are part of the liminal/liminoid activities and give the practice meaning in itself. The significance of the CrossFit practice for the interviewees is then also in the ritual *doing* in itself, not outside of it. The high metabolic demands of the WOD usually lead to the experiences of flow that can induce *communitas*. This creates a comfortable place for people, in a society that is very fragmented and where people long for social experiences. The search for the genuine, spontaneous *communitas*, then explains for the CrossFitters' endless enthusiasm of trying to make other people part of their in-group. This can be seen as adding to the image of the CrossFit as a cult that Dawson (2015) has explained with the idea of CrossFit as a reinventive institution. I have turned away from this direction of analysis, because it seems to not be applicable to the way women themselves feel about their practices. Even if Dawson's (2015) emphasis is on a voluntary nature of the reinventive institution, it seems to be too restrictive for the explaining of the fluid and processual nature of identities and lived body experiences.

Like Kinnunen's (2001, 18) bodybuilders, CrossFit can then be seen as an example of a lifestyle where at the heart of the community is paradoxically the project of immersing in the construction of the individual self. As a liminoid phenomenon, CrossFit offers a subversive space, which serves to assist people on redefining their identities. It is taken up in the name of good health and good life but it also gives women empowering experiences of embodiment that move them away from disempowering bodily experiences and taken for granted norms of beauty ideals. The exalted status and the skill and strength acquired at the box can create change outside the box, as with embodying strength and power the women are able to "attack" things in outside world, like in Bordo's (1993, 28) example of a woman who through a rigorous weight-training program finds strength to assert herself more forcefully at work. Foucault (1977) has brought forth an idea of power as productive, in that it creates potentiality for social transformation through "minute shifts of power". In this thesis CrossFit practices have been shown to be a genuinely ritual activity. Nevertheless, the female CrossFitters perform femininity through characteristics of strength, assertiveness, independence and competitiveness, with their practices making visible the unnaturalness of the idea that these are purely masculine traits or that weightlifting is a domain catered strictly for the male interest. What is thought of as masculine traits or actions are exposed as practices

of performativity. As Turner has pointed out: “Leisure is potentially capable of releasing creative powers, individual or communal, either to criticize or buttress the dominant social structural values” (1974, 68-69).

This research can be seen as contributing to an ethnographic research on female experiences of the ritual practices of sport. It also falls in line with the previous feminist studies in sport and offers a feminist anthropological perspective on the study of CrossFit phenomenon. This study was limited to only include women, and further research could be done on the questions of masculinity in the context of CrossFit and how male participants of this particular sport categorize health and pain, and extend their experiences outside the box. Another compelling subject for research would be to examine the competitive side of CrossFit and look at the CrossFit Games as a ritual of cultural performance.

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Appendix: List of interviews

Date of an interview	Name	Age	Background in sports	How long had taken part in CrossFit practices
6.8.2014	Claudia	33	Gym, ballet, running and shot put for “fun”. No competitive athletics background.	Two weeks
10.8.2014	Cathy	45	Spin class and running. No competitive athletics background.	Ten months
11.8.2014	Lauren	49	Running. Break from exercise for ten years. No competitive athletics background.	Three weeks
13.8.2014	Janessa (CrossFit coach)	30	Division one athlete in softball.	Four years
13.8.2014	Amber	52	Gym classes. No competitive athletics background.	Eleven months
15.8.2014	Lynn	46	Gym classes. No competitive athletics background.	Four years
16.8.2014	Anna	29	Yoga, Pilates. No competitive athletics background.	A year and a half
19.8.2014	Karen	48	Gym classes, such as Zumba. No competitive athletics background.	Eight months
19.8.2014	Caitlyn	46	Gym. No competitive athletics background.	Four years
20.8.2014	Hayley (CrossFit coach)	30	Volleyball in high school, running.	Five and half years
9.8.2014 (group interview)	Brittany	28	Gym, running. No competitive athletics background.	Does not practice CrossFit
9.8.2014 (group interview)	Amanda	56	Gym, aerobics, jazzercise, yoga. No competitive athletics background.	Does not practice CrossFit
9.8.2014 (group interview)	Emma	32	Hiking, Zumba. No competitive athletics background.	Does not practice CrossFit
21.8.2014	Beth	66	Jazzercise. No competitive athletics background.	Does not practice CrossFit